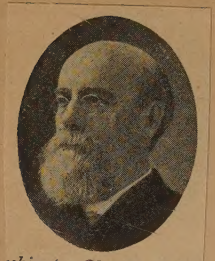

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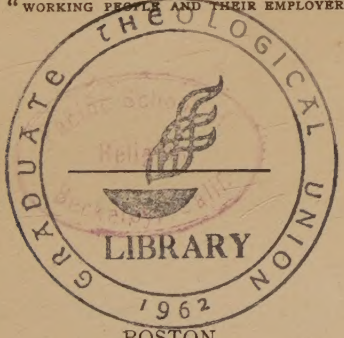
THE CHRISTIAN WAY:

WHITHER IT LEADS AND HOW TO GO ON.

BY

WASHINGTON GLADDEN,

AUTHOR OF "BEING A CHRISTIAN" "PLAIN THOUGHTS ON THE ART OF LIVING," "WORKING PEOPLE AND THEIR EMPLOYERS," ETC.



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PREFACE.

MOST of the novels end with marriage. When the period of romance is past, and the young people settle down to begin the serious work of life the novelist seems to lose his interest in them, and turns away to fresh fields of sentiment and pastures new of the tender passion.

The reason of this method may be plain, but it is not a good reason. Life after marriage needs to be idealized quite as much as life before marriage; its scope is wider, its interests larger, its affections deeper and stronger. And we may hope that the time will come when those who aspire to be the historians of the human heart, will represent life in juster proportions, no longer giving the impression that its beauty fades with the orange flowers, and that

its tale is told when the minister's voice pronounces the twain to be one.

Something like this has also happened in the treatment by the church of those who are brought into its communion. Before their names are enrolled on the church register, they are talked to and written at continually; a great deal of advice, more or less luminous, is thrown in their way; but after that the teaching is much less specific, and the impression is apt to obtain that the end of all instruction is reached at the first communion. Now it must be true that some clear and definite religious teaching is needed by those who have entered the church, as well as by those who seek to enter it; that light should be thrown not only on the beginning of the way, but also on its after stages. It is important to know how to begin to be a Christian, and it is equally important to know how to go on.

With the hope of making the way plainer this little book has been written. It is designed as a sequel to the small volume entitled, "Being a Christian." That title might well be given to this book; for it is of *being*, rather than of

becoming that these pages treat. I have heard of some who were helped by the other little book to enter the Christian way; I wish that this one might lead many from the joy of beginning into "the glory of going on."

WASHINGTON GLADDEN.

NORTH CHURCH STUDY, SPRINGFIELD,
March 2, 1877.

I.

THE CHRISTIAN'S AIM.

THE first thing for the young Christian to determine is what he is aiming at.

Christ tells us to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect; and Paul, enforcing the same truth, bids us leave the principles (rudiments) of the doctrine of Christ and go on unto perfection. That, then, is what we ought to be aiming at.

"Perfection!" you cry. "We cannot be perfect, and therefore it is useless to try." Your statement is true, but your conclusion does not follow. You cannot be perfect, nevertheless it is well worth while to try. You cannot draw a perfectly straight line, or a perfect curve, and probably you never will do either as long as you live; but if you expect to be an artist you must keep trying to do these very things. Practice will not make a draughtsman's work exactly

and mathematically perfect, but the longer and the more faithfully he practises the nearer he will come to perfection. Absolute exactness in drawing never was achieved and never will be, but there have been many artists whose work was approximately accurate and very beautiful. It would not have been so accurate or so beautiful, if they had not tried to make it perfect. Just so with the art of living. You cannot, with your finite powers, live a life of flawless rectitude; but you must bring your work at every trial just as near as you can to absolute perfection. *The highest attainable beauty of character is only reached by those who aim at perfect goodness.*

It is necessary, then, when you set out in your Christian career to fix your mark at perfection, and aim at it steadily every day. Nothing short of this endeavor will answer at all.

Just think! Would it do for a builder to say: "I will not try to set this column exactly perpendicular; if it comes pretty near it, that is all I care for?" Would a surveyor be justified in saying: "I am not going to run this north and south boundary line exactly straight;

no matter if it does veer a little to the east or the west?" What sort of music would the singer make who did not try to sing in perfect tune, but was content with coming within a half tone or a quarter-tone of the pitch? To aim at any thing less than perfection would be in the singer bad art, in the surveyor bad science, in the builder bad architecture. To aim at anything lower than perfection is in the Christian disciple bad religion.

What would you think of one who deliberately resolved to be less than perfectly truthful, or less than perfectly accurate in making change, or less than perfectly prompt in keeping his promises? I do not say that any one succeeds in being perfect in any of these things, but what sort of a man is he who either resolves that he will not try to be, or, what is practically the same thing, refuses to resolve that he will try to be? I think he is the sort of man whom none of us want to keep over night. In morals as well as in art and in science the standard of perfection is the only standard that can for one moment be tolerated. From him who does not distinctly recognize it as the rule by which his

aims in life are guided, we instantly withdraw as from a man of corrupt thought and dangerous influence. That is the fact so far as morals are concerned.

But what is our religion if it is not the divine power that aids us in living moral lives? The end at which Christianity aims is a perfect morality. The object for which Christ came into the world was to save men from trangression of the moral law, and to bring them to obey it. The work that he does for us reaches its consummation only when this law is enthroned in our hearts and in our lives. To be a perfect Christian and to be a perfectly moral man, are then, at bottom, one and the same thing; and if it is not safe to attempt anything less than perfection in morals, it is unsafe to have any lower standard than perfection in our religious life.

When I say that to be a perfect Christian is the same thing as to be a perfectly moral man, I use the word moral in a little larger sense than that which some persons are accustomed to give to it. The moral law, as the catechism says, is "summarily comprehended in the ten com-

maudments:" and the ten commandments, as Christ says, are summed up in these two: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." That is the moral law in its highest and completest expression. Now no man can be properly called a moral man who does not obey that law. He who obeys half of it is not truly a moral man. He who is perfect toward his neighbor; but is not perfect toward God is not a moral man. Neither is he morally perfect whose character is only negative; who merely obeys the prohibitions of the decalogue; who simply does not kill, nor steal, nor cheat, nor lie, nor slander, nor covet. Many men wish to pass for moral men on the ground that they abstain from these evil practices, but it is a very narrow and inadequate definition which is given to the word moral by those who make this claim. Nothing really deserves the name that does not signify obedience to the whole law, as Christ has laid it down. And beyond this there is nothing, above this there is nothing; it is the supreme good of life Not to destroy this law but to

fulfil it, and to give us power that we too might fulfil it and thus become the sons of God, was the very errand that brought our Saviour down to earth.

Let no man speak then of "mere morality," as if that were somehow a secondary and dispensable good. Mere morality! One might as well speak of the mere sweetness of sugar, or the mere beauty of a rose or the mere correctness of a sum in addition. To say of a man that he merely loves God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself is not, I should hope, greatly to disparage him!

Such, then is the perfection at which in our Christian lives we are to aim. It is nothing less than entire obedience to the Christian law, perfect consecration to the service of Christ. We hear a good deal now-a-days about "the higher Christian life." I do not like the phrase. A Christian life that finds its end in being a little higher than some other Christian life; a holiness that consists in being a little holier than somebody else, I do not believe in. The curse of Pharisaism is in the comparative degree. The division of believers into two classes, the lower

and the higher, the fine and the superfine, is a most mischievous device. Graded schools may be very good, but graded churches are an abomination whether the grade line be money or culture or "holiness." There is a theory that there are two kinds of piety, on one of which a man can manage to scrape along and get into heaven when he dies; the other of which is a commodity vastly superior; and that the difference between the one state and the other is just as clearly marked as the difference between the unconverted and the converted. This theory has, as I believe, no Scriptural foundation, and it is calculated to do no inconsiderable damage. Those who suppose themselves to have "experienced" this higher Christian life, are likely to be lifted up with spiritual conceit; and those who do not aspire to it will be encouraged in indolence and unfaithfulness. "There is a higher Christian life and there is a lower," they say. But since both result in final salvation, what is the use, the worldly disciple wants to know, of straining after this superior sanctity? Any road by which a man can escape from hell and fly to heaven is a good enough road for him. If the church is to

be graded a great majority of the members will be quite content to stop in the lower grade.

No, we want no merely *higher* Christian life. Comparative piety is an offence. God's law deals only in superlatives. Not toward that which is higher, but that which is highest toward our thoughts must rise, and our feet must travel. No man can be a Christian without the honest purpose of entire consecration. It is the whole heart and nothing less that is demanded of every believer. It is demanded at the beginning, and what is required at the first moment of the Christian life is equally required at every subsequent moment. Surely no less is expected of the mature disciple than of the beginner. The practiced accountant is not less particular to be accurate than the child that is just commencing to add. The adopted citizen is not supposed to be less loyal after he has been voting ten years, than when he first took his oath of allegiance. And if a strenuous purpose to give the whole heart to God, and to be perfectly conformed to his will is the indispensable condition of entering upon the Christian life it must be the indispensable condition of continuing in it.

The failure to understand this truth is the cause of many feeble and defective Christian lives. The standard set up at the beginning is imperfect, and thus all the issues of the life are distorted and vitiated. The ship whose compass needle is deflected by some hidden metal, is steered helplessly hither and thither, and is fortunate if it be not driven upon the rocks; and thus the life whose aim is not directed at the pole star of perfection, is at the mercy of every current of caprice, and every gust of passion.

Many a young Christian starts out with no higher purpose than to be about as good as the average. Such an one inevitably falls a good deal below the average. No man ever comes quite up to his ideals in moral or spiritual culture; and if his conceptions are low, his practice will be lower still.

Others set forth with the ambition to be as good as the best Christians they know. But they forget that these best Christians have attained to their present high character, not by trying to be about as good as somebody else, but by trying to do just right every day, to have their works perfect before God. No man ever reached

any exalted spiritual stature by obedience to any lower rule of life. That is the only rule. It is not "Be as good as Paul or Priscilla or Edward Payson or Lady Huntington." It is not "Be as good as the average." It is "Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." The projectile that is aimed at the zenith goes the highest; any other range reaches a lower plane, and the more the range is depressed, the more speedily does gravitation clip the wings of the projecting force and bring the body down to earth. That is the law of moving bodies, and it is equally the law of self-moving and conscious souls.

Because it is the only rational and logical thing to do, and because it is the only safe thing to do, we ought to set out in the Christian life with the determination to come just as near to perfection as we can every day we live. But there is another reason. We ought to do it because it is the easiest thing to do. That seems incredible, I know; but it is true. If one is going to be a Christian at all it is easier to be a thorough going Christian than to be a half-way Christian. It is true that a different opin-

ion prevails. Many persons think that the difficulties of the Christian life are all encountered by those who are living consistent and devoted lives: that the tempter gives us no trouble so long as we are sluggish and unfaithful, but that he brings all his forces of temptation and persecution to bear upon us as soon as we wake up and try to do our whole duty. But that, I believe, is a grave mistake. The devil is not only a fool, he is a coward; and the more resolute and determined the Christian is the less the devil will trouble him. Over faithless and timid disciples he domineers like an old tyrant, as he is; from the face of the brave and trustful soldier of the cross he incontinently flies.

If the awakened conscience be a vicarious conscience, exercised about other people's sins fully as much as about those for which it is alone responsible,—if the new activity be an activity that busies itself mainly with stirring up others to a performance of their neglected duties, then, very likely, the access of zeal will arouse opposition, and what seems like persecution. And I have noticed that those Christians who are heard complaining that fidelity brings trouble

are often this very sort of people who are a good deal more concerned to keep their neighbors in the right way than they are to keep the right way themselves.

It is true, of course, that sometimes faithful living does bring loss and suffering, but even then the loss and suffering that are incurred through such fidelity are a great deal easier to bear than the whips and scorpions of reproving conscience with which the unfaithful Christian is constantly tormented.

Look at Paul and Silas down in the dark hold of that Philippian dungeon at midnight, their feet fast in the stocks! What are they doing? Singing! The two happiest men in that city, I warrant you! Ask them if the thoroughgoing fidelity to Christ of which their lives are full is a hard service. Listen! One of them is answering: "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong."

In the midst of perils and persecutions, the man whose heart is stayed on God thus finds His perfect peace.

Look at those two Christians—both tempted to-day in the market-place. The one yields to the temptation, and by an act of fraud or oppression adds a handsome sum to his hoard, the price of iniquity. The other resists the temptation. The act of wrong which he might have done would have saved him his little property; the act of right which he did do has sacrificed it all and he is penniless. Which of the two, think you, will go to his couch to-night with the lighter heart? Which is the happier man? Not which will be, by and by, when the dead small and great shall stand before God and the books shall be opened, but here to-day while the living, small and great, *are standing before God*, and the angel is writing in the books the record that shall be read by and by—now and here which of the two men is the happier? If you find any trouble in answering that question, may God have mercy on your soul! Not to know and feel that losses which come through integrity are more to be desired than gains that come through sin is to be in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity!

Of course one may fall into such a condition

of blindness and stupor that he shall have no conscience about sins of this character, but I am talking about Christians now, and a man without a conscience is not a Christian. The Christian may take the wrong road in a matter of principle—such things have happened, and are happening, alas! every day; but he finds it always a great deal harder to travel than the right road would have been. Long before he gets to the end of it he wishes that he had gone the other way.

Let me not seem to say that straight-forward honesty and fidelity in this department of life is more likely to bring material losses than dishonesty and fraud. I say nothing of the kind. All I say is that when tribulations do come to the upright Christian he knows how to glory in them; that he has more comfort in his misfortune than the crooked Christian has in his ill-gotten gains. But beyond all this I have no doubt it is true that, even outwardly, the Christian who endeavors to rule his life by the highest standards of honesty and honor, has in the long-run, and on the grand scale, a smoother and easier life of it than the Christian who thinks

that 'business is business" and that "religion is religion." "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness"—pleasanter by far, and more prosperous, too, even this side the pearly gates, than are the ways of folly. Of course they are. Jehovah, and not Beelzebub is supreme in this universe,—in the whole of it. Never forget that!

What has been said of the Christian's service in its moral aspects is just as true of it in its more strictly religious aspects. It is easier to be a good and faithful Christian in every department of life than to be a bad and unfaithful one. It is easier and pleasanter to do our duties thoroughly and promptly than not to do them, or to do them in a slipshod and reluctant fashion. They who do the most Christian work do it with the least effort. It is not hard for a man to serve Christ, with voice or hands or feet or purse, who is at it all the time, whose heart and life are full of it. It comes to be as natural as breathing, and as good as a feast to him. Not to do it would be the hard thing for him. People talk about Christian labor being a cross, but it is no cross to the thorough-going Christian. It is his meat and drink.

The people in the church who have the hardest time are not the people who work, but the people who shirk. I am speaking of course of those people in the church who have consciences, who know that there is work to be done, and that they ought to help in doing it; but who make up their minds not to do as much of it as they can, but to do no more than they must. These are the people who live uncomfortable lives. While they are neglectful and disobedient conscience keeps scourging them; and when, now and then, they make a desperate effort to perform some slight service for the easing of this pain, they find it very hard work. The joints of the spiritual frame get very rusty if they are not exercised, and it hurts us to bend them. And not only is there a feeling that the effort is severe, there is also a consciousness of lost power. The man who does not use his strength loses his strength. Any faculty neglected is speedily impaired. One of our missionaries, who has been in this country on account of ill health for three years told me the other day that he had nearly lost the use of the language in which he had learned to preach;

that it would cost him months of study if he should return to regain his Bulgarian vocabulary. So with the language of the spiritual life. If you do not keep speaking it, you lose the use of it, and when you try to open your mouth, you stammer and are dumb.

Is not all this true, my friends? Perhaps there may be those among you who know by a sorry experience that it is true. You have been trying to live a half-way Christian life,—or a little less than that, perhaps! Have you found it a comfortable life? Has not a feeling of unrest and dissatisfaction made its home in your heart, and kept you miserable? Has not this consciousness of your waning power, this experience of embarrassment and painful effort whenever you have tried to say or do anything for Christ distressed and humiliated you? Would you not have been happier Christians, if you had been more faithful Christians? Has not your comfort been in exact proportion to your fidelity, and have not the ease and pleasantness of the labors you have undertaken for the Master, been also in exact proportion to the

thoroughness and promptness with which they have been done?

I know that it is so. I know that there is no other way in which the Christian can find any peace except that perfect way in which the Psalmist strove to walk. Not one of us is always in it; not one of us but wanders from it now and then; but happiness is not found anywhere outside of it, and they who are furthest from it are furthest from true peace. All you then, who have begun to be Christians, no matter when you began, remember that the path in which your feet is set leads up to perfection, and that you ought to be walking on in it steadily every day. To do the right perfectly, whenever the right is shown; to shun the wrong always, whenever the wrong is seen; to neglect no Christian service, to leave unimproved no opportunity of Christian growth,—this is the only rational thing, the only safe thing, the only easy thing to do. You will not always accomplish it, but you cannot afford to undertake anything less. He who knows our frame, because he has worn it, will be patient with our failings so long as our aim is the high-

est; when we wander and stumble he will help us to rise and will lead us back into the perfect path; and by and by, O blessed hope! out of the reach of the sin and the stain, we shall walk with him in white, in the Paradise of God.

II

THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING.

CHRISTIAN perfection is a sphere whose hemispheres are a perfect culture and a perfect service. It is of culture, I suppose, that Paul is speaking, when he says that he writes to the Philippians, not as one who is "already perfect," but as one who is following after perfection and striving to attain it. And it is to service that he refers when he prays for the Hebrews that the God of peace will make them "perfect in every good work to do his will." To *be* good, and to *do* good are the two objects set before the Christian; to develop a perfect character by rendering a perfect service, is the mark of the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus.

Which of these objects ought to be first? Should our first care be to purify and ennoble ourselves, or to do good to others as we have opportunity?

Practically it is hard to keep these two aims distinct. True culture, Christian culture, leads to service, and expresses itself in service, continually; while faithful and loving service is the very best means of promoting Christian culture.

Something that goes by the name of culture and that has nothing at all to do with service, is abroad in the land. It is a culture that deals with the intellect and the taste, and, to some extent with the conscience, but that does not change the ruling love; a culture whose result is not the enlargement of the whole nature but the refinement of a part of it, and the crippling of the rest; a culture that shuts men out from all pursuits that are not agreeable, and from all society that is not stimulating, and makes self-pleasing rather than benevolence the law of life. Of course the votaries of this sort of culture, even though they may be members of our churches, are not likely to have much trouble in settling this question. Those who love themselves so much better than their neighbors that they will have nothing whatever to do with any of them but such as can minister to their profit or their enjoyment are not in any proper sense Christians, and are not

interested in discovering the relation between Christian culture and Christian service.

These words are not addressed to persons of this class, but rather to those who have chosen Christ as their Master, and who wish to be his true disciples. And any one who with a sincere mind has sought to be instructed in the things of his kingdom, must have learned that the law of service is among the supreme laws of that kingdom. If it is not the very highest law, it is surely one of the highest. For they have heard the Master himself saying:

"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you let him be as the younger; and he that is chief as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? *But I am among you as he that serveth.*"

Even those who acknowledge this Master, however, and who are faithfully trying to follow him, may, if you put the question to them, find it difficult to answer whether holiness is more to

be desired than usefulness. They know that Jesus went about doing good, and they know also that he came to save us from our sins; so that if we accept his grace and become his disciples, we shall surely be led not only toward service, but also toward sanctification. The Christian cannot become good without doing good; neither can he do good without becoming good. A holiness which is not the handmaid of benevolence, is a spurious holiness; a benevolence which is divorced from integrity and purity of life is a cheat and a snare. The Christian idea is that the two must always go together, that a separation of them makes a fatal breach in the character.

Unhappily they are often separated. There is a Pharisaism which devotes all its energies to the cultivation of personal righteousness, without doing anything for the good of others; and there is a sentimental philanthropy which makes out that the doer of generous deeds is a saint, no matter how vile his life may be. It is hardly necessary to portray and denounce Pharisaism, for our popular literature during the last thirty years has been making this exposure so con

stantly and so thoroughly that nothing remains to be said. It is perfectly safe to abuse the Pharisee; he has no friends. But in their crusade against Pharisaism our sentimentalists have developed a type of character which is no less disgusting. That is the good Samaritan with bad morals; the man who is unfaithful in nearly all the relations of life, and dissolute in all his habits, but whose generous impulses lead him to do a great many kind things, and even to make sacrifices for his fellows. In these popular portraitures integrity and purity are not only divorced from benevolence, but are even contrasted with it, so that the impression is sometimes made that it is rather a contemptible thing to be just and clean; and that if a man is only kind hearted and self-sacrificing it matters not how great a rake he is. Thus, to give a plain instance, Mr. John Hay glorifies his hero, Jim Bludso, who stood at his post and burned to death, as a man who "never lied," though, according to the poet's own account, he had two wives, living in different parts of the country. Just how a man could have two wives at the same time without lying to one or both of them

the poet does not tell us. But infidelity of this description is, in all this sort of literature, a mere peccadillo; that sort of lying doesn't count; some deed that is done with a generous impulse sponges out all that shame. Sentimentalism of this sort is not only sickly, it is nauseating. We cannot too soon understand that generosity can never be a substitute for integrity, and that the character in which the two principles are divorced is a radically unsound character, no matter which of them may have the supremacy.

What, then, must be our answer to this question? Is there no choice between holiness and benevolence? Are they equally to be desired? Should neither of them take precedence of the other in our thought?

It is not an easy question to answer, because, as I have shown, they cannot *practically* be separated. Yet I think that there is a choice between them, and that in fixing our aim in life, the preference must be given to benevolence rather than to holiness, to service rather than to culture. The two must always go together, but benevolence must lead. In their practice Pharisees and sentimentalists are equally wrong, but

in their theories, the sentimentalists are a little nearer right than the Pharisees.

You will see that service rather than sanctification is to be our supreme aim, if you remember that the law of life is the law of *love*. This law does not forbid a rational self-love, for we are to love our neighbors *as ourselves*, but the tendency which it gives to the affections is outward, rather than inward. We are to love God with all the heart, and the only proof of love is service—"If ye love me keep my commandments." We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and this love can only find expression in our efforts to do them good. So far then as this law is obeyed, its effect must be to turn the man's thought away from himself, toward God and his neighbor,—to make him think that it is more important that he should serve them than that he should labor for his own sanctification. Of course he will not neglect his own soul,—he will keep himself unspotted from the world; but he will always put above his own interests, temporal and spiritual, the service of God and of his fellow men.

The first thing to do is to break the sceptre of the reigning selfishness. The law of Christ

meets this old law that is in the members, and summons it to surrender. There is no compromise between them,—there cannot be. No joint supremacy is allowed and no concurrent jurisdiction. "You have been loving yourself supremely," says Christ; "now you must renounce that allegiance and love God with all the heart and your neighbor as yourself."

Nothing can be done for the purification of any man's character till he ceases to make self the centre of his thought and effort. The first step to perfection leads out of self. Therefore the law of Christ is not primarily a law of culture but a law of service.

I have dwelt upon this point because it is of considerable importance. If one makes his own sanctification the chief object of desire and effort, even though he may believe that sanctification can only be secured through service and sacrifice, yet because the supreme aim centres in self, all his generous acts are vitiated by the thought of the advantage that is to accrue. Thus the reigning selfishness does not surrender, it only shifts its position and flies its flag from the citadel of Mansoul, instead of the outer wall.

Thus many a man is as selfish in his religion as he ever was in his trade or his amusements. He is a miser of spiritual gains: his whole thought is of his own moods and conditions. The only remedy for this distemper is the realization of the truth that the end of all Christian endeavor is service, rather than culture.

Paul's question, when the light from heaven smote him, was, then, the right question: "What wilt Thou have me to do?" Not first, What wilt thou have me to *be?* but what wilt thou have me to do? The *being* is the result of the doing; the perfect Christian character is the fruit of the perfect Christian conduct. And the ruling motive of the conduct is not to be self-love, but love for God and for our fellow men.

What answer does Paul's life give to his question. When the scales fall from his eyes at the touch of Ananias, and he is baptized into the name of that Christ whom he came to Damascus to persecute, how does he begin his Christian life? Does his first thought seem to be of self improvement, or of service? We are told that "straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues." As he began, so he went on. Through-

out that part of his life of which we have knowledge his energies were wholly given to service. The moral and spiritual culture that he gained was not sought as an end, it came to him as the result of faithful and self-denying work.

It does not, however, follow that because Paul, after his conversion, went straightway into the synagogue and preached, we must all go into public places and begin to preach. We may adopt the same rule of service that he adopted, but we may not all be called to the same kind of service. Paul was a thoroughly educated man: he had graduated from the most famous school of Jewish learning; he was familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, and he was in every respect qualified for the kind of labor to which he devoted his life. It was a very important, perhaps the most important branch of the Christian service that he chose; but there are many ways of doing good besides public speaking, and it is quite likely that the duties to which we are first summoned may be of a different kind from those in which he was engaged.

Our Master himself often preached in public

places, but that, after all, was a very small part of his work. Not only did he in his conversations with men, in their homes and by the wayside, repeat to them the Gospel of his Kingdom; not only did he in his many marvelous works relieve their wants, and heal their sicknesses; by methods less marvelous than these he manifested his glory, and drew men unto himself. When it is said that he went about doing good, I think it is meant, not only that he wrought miracles of mercy, and taught with lips divine the mysteries of grace, but also that his presence, wherever he went, was a benediction; that his kindly speech and his gentle spirit, his countless words of sympathy and encouragement, his nameless deeds of fidelity and of friendliness, made the hearts of men glow within them. That part of Christ's life which was most truly divine, most deeply and powerfully helpful to men, was not reported because it was unreportable. It was what found expression in his looks and tones, in "the manner of his spirit," rather than in the matter of his speech.

It is in these less conspicuous virtues, that

we shall wisely begin to imitate him. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much," the Master says. If we can serve well in these lower walks of usefulness we shall learn to do larger duties when they summon us.

Home is a good place to begin. There is no little good to be done within the four walls of that temple. No service is more sacred than that to which our homes call us. In no place in the world can we hope to be more useful than in that place wherein we spend our daily lives. There are, of course, strictly religious duties that we owe to those with whom we live. We ought to desire their spiritual welfare above everything else, and to find ways of expressing that desire. But this is only one of the duties that we owe them, and this duty is best done when we have evinced our sincerity and our fidelity in other ways and by many infallible proofs. There are a thousand methods in which we may put our religion in practice in our homes, and practice goes further than preaching there and everywhere. The spirit of Christ is the spirit of unselfish service, and it ought to find expression in all our conduct. To do good continually to

the inmates of our homes; to speak kindly to them, always; to lighten their burdens of care and labor in every possible way; to seek their comfort and pleasure rather than our own; to make cheerfully the little sacrifices that their happiness requires; to be patient with their faults, while faithfully and tenderly endeavoring to correct them,—such service as this it is to which Christ calls us in our homes. I doubt whether he has any more important service than this awaiting us anywhere. Yet there is reason to fear that this kind of Christian work is greatly overlooked. We do not always think, when we ask the Lord what he would have us to do for him, of the sacrifices that we may lay upon the altar of the home—more precious in his sight than whole burnt offerings. It is in this sphere that the religious character is most sharply tested, and it is in this sphere that its most beautiful development is reached. The Christian who is thoroughly good at home, who ministers at that altar with steadfast patience and loving fidelity, can hardly fail to have influence away from home; while he who fails to manifest in the private walks of life the graces of that

religion which he commends in public places can scarcely hope that his word will be with power.

In other quiet ways outside the home opportunities of service will be found. There are chances enough to say friendly words, and to do helpful deeds, if one is only looking out for them. There are plenty of rough places to be made smooth, and crooked places to be made straight, and the heart that is intent on doing good will delight to discover them. And my point is that these neighborly words and deeds, that spring from a thoughtful regard for the welfare of others, and a self-sacrificing purpose to secure their happiness, are in the truest sense Christian service. That is the most excellent way of fulfilling the law of Christ; better than tongues, better than prophecies, better than miracles.

Yet I am sure that many good people never think of these unselfish endeavors in the little details of social intercourse to promote the welfare of their neighbors, as being in any sense Christian service. Serving Christ, they think, is speaking in the prayer-meeting, teaching in the

Sunday school, distributing tracts, visiting the widow and the fatherless in their affliction, conversing with the impenitent about their souls and all such work. Now all this is important, as we shall see hereafter, but after all a great deal of genuine and valuable Christian work is done in such ways as I have mentioned, in these quiet ministries of brotherly kindness, and all work that is done with a Christian spirit and a Christian purpose is Christian work. He who gives a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple shall in no wise lose his reward.

Of course you will not desire the temporal enjoyment of your neighbors more than their spiritual welfare, and in your care for their comfort you will keep wishing for the opportunity and the power to do them a higher service; but the main thing is to get yourself installed in the purpose and the habit of doing them good, of ministering to them and blessing them in every possible way. When that becomes the impulse of your life it will be quite impossible for you to forget their deeper necessities, and the more enduring joys to which, if they are not serving your Master, they are still strangers.

But you ought to remember that any honest endeavor to confer benefits upon your neighbors is a truly Christian service; that in this field of labor there is always plenty to do, and that it is quite impossible for any of us to have too much of this sort of religion.

Not only by acts of kindness can we serve our fellows, but also by acts of fidelity, by steadfast adherence to truth and duty. Many of them are measuring their lives by false standards. Not only by our example, but also by such sincere and faithful words as we may have a right to speak, let us lift up before them a better standard. Many of them are vain and frivolous, thinking more of appearances than of realities; can we not by our conduct, and by an earnest word dropped now and then, show them a sounder way of thinking, and a better way of living? That is a most important service which we render to our neighbors when we set before them an example of integrity, of purity, of faithfulness to every obligation, of inflexible adherence to the truth; and thus by life as well as by precept endeavor to lead them in wisdom's ways. This kind of service calls for firmness as

well as kindness; steady walking in the light of our own convictions; constant choice of duty above pleasure;—no obtrusive thrusting of our notions upon other people, but a readiness to stand by them and live up to them at whatever cost. By such fidelity and devotion as this we can do our neighbors more good than by any other method.

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." It is all summed up by saying that we ought to set out in our Christian lives remembering that we are the followers of one who went about doing good—that his mission is our mission—that our main business is to do good, and that we must not look too high nor too far off for our opportunities of doing good, seeing that the most and the best of them lie very near our doors; seeing that the bringing of a Christian temper and of a self-denying purpose into the details of our home life, and into all our social and neighborly and business intercourse—to brighten the lives of those who walk beside us in the way, to help

them as we can in bearing their burdens, and to lead them if we may into the ways of truth and peace—is the very highest kind of service that any man can think of rendering. 'What could an angel more?"

III.

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE CHURCH.

It is taken for granted that the persons to whom these words are addressed, being Christians, are members of Christ's church.

If they are Christians they are disciples of Christ, and the Church is Christ's school, in which, by his appointment, instruction is given to as many as desire to learn the word of truth and the way of life.

If they are Christians, they are "workers together with Him," and his work in this world is mainly done by organization, and the church is the organization by which his work is done. Much may be done, no doubt, by influences purely spiritual, but as human beings now are, the church of God must have an outward form, a bodily organism, in order that it may live and thrive in the world. There is just the same need that the church should be incarnate in a

visible assembly, as there was that Christ should be incarnate in a visible body. No religious impression can be made upon the dull senses of the children of men without putting the religious life into palpable forms. Moreover power is gained by organization; the work is subdivided and wisely directed, and larger results are obtained. It is just as unreasonable for a Christian to refuse to join the church and to insist on doing his Christian work independently, as it would be for a patriot to refuse to enlist in the army that was defending his country, and to insist on fighting the invader alone. In the Christian warfare organization is necessary as well as in the conflicts with carnal weapons; and it is therefore necessary that all the effective strength we have be added to our army. The camp-followers may have a very patriotic feeling, but it is not in that part of the force that the good soldier wants to be counted.

Furthermore, if he is a Christian, he recognizes the command of Christ as his law, and Christ commands his disciples to be baptized. No exceptions are mentioned, no alternative is suggested. He who wishes to obey implicitly

the word of the Lord will avail himself of the first opportunity to receive baptism as his disciple. His response to the Gospel will be the word of the Ethiopian chamberlain. "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?"

"But are there not Christians who are not Church members?" you ask. No doubt there are; just as there are Christians who do not study their Bibles. The Bible is the revelation of God to men, and Christ has commanded us to study it. Yet there are those who seem to think they know enough already, or who imagine that they can learn of God what they need to know in nature or by direct inspiration, and who therefore disobey Christ's command to search the Scriptures. This command is certainly no more explicit than the command to be baptized, and to confess Christ openly before men. And the reason of obedience is as clear in one case as in the other. The Bible is the treasury of Christian truth, and therefore all those who desire to be wise unto salvation ought to study it; the church is the organization for Christian work, and, therefore, all those who desire to be about the Master's business in this world ought to join

it. It is true that some religious work is done outside the church; and it is also true that some religious truth is found outside the Bible.

The man who professes to be a servant of Christ, and yet neglects to join the church, is therefore, just as foolish and just as disobedient, as the man who professes to be a disciple of Christ, and yet neglects to study the Bible. I do not choose to take it for granted that the Christians to whom these counsels are addressed are either foolish or disobedient, and therefore I must conclude that they are either in the church already, or mean to connect themselves with it at the earliest possible moment.

There are, however, two doors by which men go into the visible Church, the door of self-interest and the door of consecration. The great majority of those who enter the church go in by the door of self-interest. The great majority of those who begin the Christian life do so with the hope of personal advantage.

Now let me not be misunderstood. I am not saying that most of our church members joined the church for the sake of increasing their business, nor for the sake of securing a better social

position. Such an accusation would be a slander. The number of those who seek admission to our churches simply or mainly in view of *worldly* advantages that may accrue to them in the relation, is, I believe, very small. The self-interest which is the ruling motive at the beginning of most Christian lives, is of a much higher and worthier type. The advantage sought is not carnal but moral and spiritual. The man enters the church because he expects to find in its fellowship and in its worship a help in overcoming sin and in attaining unto virtue. He goes in because he thinks it will do him good,—that it will aid him in securing the highest good. Now although this is self-interest of a very wholesome sort, it is still self-interest. The man's main concern is his own welfare; his thought centres on himself.

I do not complain that men go into the church by this door. I am glad that they do. I wish that this kind of self-seeking would begin to spread. The ambition to be free from sin, to build up a perfect character, is a very noble ambition—next to the noblest. And if any one accepts Christ as his Saviour from sin, and seeks

to enter Christ's church because he believes that in its associations and its services he will obtain strength for his warfare with the evil, and his pursuit of the good, he ought to be most heartily welcomed. If he is sincere and earnest in his search after righteousness, he will soon make the discovery that the sin from which he is seeking to be saved is in its essence selfishness; and that the way to be rid of it is to begin to think less about himself and more about others—"to look out and not in, and to lend a hand."

When he comes to that, he will find himself in company with those who entered the church by the other door—the door of consecration; whose main motive in seeking admission to it was not the hope of personal advantage, but the desire to help in doing the Lord's work. There *are* church members who came in by that door There are those who, at the first surrender of their lives to Christ, comprehended his saying: "If any man will come after me let him deny himself,"—and who therefore came to the portals of the church, seeking not to be ministered unto but to minister.

It makes a world of difference with the com-

fort and the usefulness of a Christian which of these motives is the ruling motive in his life. The man who is seeking his own welfare as the supreme object of his desire, even though it may be his spiritual welfare rather than his temporal advantage that he is seeking—is not in the mood of service. It is vastly better that he should be intent on this higher good, than that he should be hungering after sensual gratification or worldly gains or honors; but so long as this is the temper of his life he must still be numbered among those who seek their own and not the things which are Jesus Christ's. We are glad to have people come into the church for the sake of the good they can *get;* but they are a much less useful and a much more troublesome class of church members than those who come in for the sake of the good they can *do.* Just in proportion as the man's thoughts centre upon himself, and upon the good that he is going to receive from the relation, socially or spiritually, will he fail to get what he is looking for. Such a person is very liable to fall into a discontented and complaining mood. Ninety-nine hundredths of all the dissatisfaction that exists among church

members grows out of some real or imagined neglect on the part of somebody to minister to their selfhood.

It is said, and some of us have reason to know that it is true, that great advantages of a moral and spiritual nature come to us through the family relation. That in these dear intimacies of the home our characters are purified, and our whole natures ennobled, who does not believe? But in order that this result may be realized, it is necessary that we enter into this relation with the disposition and the purpose of self-forgetfulness. Suppose that each member of the household is all the while looking out for his own comfort or benefit; all the while keeping watch to see how much he is going to be waited on and petted; how much he is going to be improved in his temper and his morals; whether the net result of this association is going to be on the side of profit or loss in his personal account—what sort of a home would that be? Does not every body know that it could only be a cage of discords and alienations? Is it not the plainest truth that the law of Christ which bids us bear one another's burdens, which

commands us to look not every one on his own things but also on the things of others, is the only law by which family life can be made endurable? And is it not the experience of those who, in the household, have faithfully tried to put this law in practice, that there is no happiness to be compared with that which grows out of the sweet accord, the sacred fellowship and the loving ministry of the Christian home? Well Christ's law applies to his church, quite as truly as to our families; and it is quite as impossible for one to derive the highest good from his association with the church if his supreme thought is of his own welfare, as it would be to find profit in the family life with that spirit ruling him.

While, therefore, I am glad to have people come into the church by the door of self-interest, I know that they will be neither happy nor useful there very long, if they do not rise to a higher plane of action, and begin to work not for their own welfare but for the good of others. And by whichever door you went in, you ought not to stop till you find yourselves in company with those who went in by the door of consecration, and who are seeking first the kingdom of God,

rather than to read their own titles clear to mansions in the skies. You will not be of much use anywhere till you have discovered that you are not the centre of the universe, and that you are the servant of one who "died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves." Those members of the church that are governed by this spirit never have any discontents to ventilate; never complain of neglect; never fail to find plenty of appreciation. Their concern is not how much they are going to draw out of the joint stock of good will and helpful fellowship week by week, but how much they will be able to put in. If they are troubled about anything it is not that they receive less than they should of notice and consideration, but that they give less than they would of service and brotherly kindness.

This, then, is the spirit by which every Christian ought to be governed in his relation to the church, because this is the spirit of Christ. And if this is your spirit it will be easy for you to learn to do the work to which the church calls all its members.

In the first place, you will not wait for

somebody to go after you and beseech you to lend your aid; you will go yourself and ask for work. "Here am I; send me!" will be your prompt answer to that call for laborers which does not need to be spoken, because it rings in all our ears continually. Go right to your minister or your Sunday School Superintendent and tell him you want something to do. It may take his breath away the first time, for such applications are not near so frequent as the ring of the tramp at the basement door bell; but never mind! if you break it gently to him, he will bear up under it, probably, and perhaps, after several experiences of this sort, he may even come to enjoy it. At any rate, I am very sure that he will be able to find some service for you. And why, I beg to know, is it not your duty to ask for it, instead of waiting to be urged to undertake it? Suppose that some terrible accident occurs and scores of wounded and needy sufferers are thrown upon the care of the public. Immediately methods of relief are organized; by general consent somebody takes charge of the work, and gives direction how it must be done. The sufferers are at your doors

in perishing need of immediate attention. It is nobody's official duty to take care of them; it is simply the obligation of charity, and it rests on all alike. What will you all do now? Will you sit still in your houses and wait to be sent for, or will you volunteer? What would be the dictate of simple humanity? What would you think of the man who excused himself for neglecting to do anything for these sufferers on the ground that nobody had asked him to do any thing? Now the need of Christian work in connection with all our churches is really just as immediate and just as urgent, as the need of charitable work in such a case. It does not address itself quite so palpably to our senses, but it is none the less a crying need. The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. And no one who has any adequate idea of the urgency of this work, or of the spirit in which it ought to be prosecuted, will wait to be urged to enter upon it.

Ask for work, then. Wherever you may be sojourning, with whatever church you may be worshipping, report for duty. Go right to headquarters and say: "Here I am! I have no

boasts to utter about my own capacity, but such gifts as I have I want to make the most of. Use me. Judge for yourself what I am good for and set me at it; I'll do my level best, what ever it is. If you find that I don't succeed in it, and that somebody else would do better, then put somebody else in my place, and give me something that I can do. I don't want the best place nor the easiest place; I want the place where I can do the most good, and I want you to judge where that is."

That, it seems to me, is the spirit in which the church member ought to approach church work. He ought to accept every service assigned to him, if it be at all possible for him to perform it, and he ought to discharge its duties to the best of his ability. He ought not to suppose that his pastor or the leaders of church work are so insincere as to assign him to a service which they do not want him to perform, or which they do not think him capable of performing; and their judgment as to the best man for the work is probably quite as good as his. Let him take up the duty therefore cheerfully, and do

his best to justify the confidence reposed in him.

Not seldom service is refused on the plea of incompetency. It is a plea that a soldier never thinks of making, and that a Christian ought to be ashamed to make. If you cannot stand at the post assigned you, you can fall there.

Laziness and faithlessness go stalking abroad in all our churches under the garb of modesty. It sounds a great deal better to say "I am not capable," than to say "I am too indolent," or "My heart is too full of other interests." If you are the willing worker that you ought to be you will have no occasion to resort to any of these small hypocrisies.

Don't be numbered among the decliners. Some of the religious teachers say that this is an age of declension. However this may be I am sure that it is a declining age.

> Of all things doleful in speech or sign
> This is the dolefullest "I decline!"

After one has heard that said four or five times in the course of one meeting, he wants to go home. Don't say it. Unless it is an absolute

impossibility, accept, cheerfully, every position to which you are chosen.

Some one has said that the whole human race may be divided into two classes,—those who will serve on committees and those who will not. The first class will because they say "somebody must;" the second class won't because they say "somebody will." Be sure and belong to the first class.

Do not, however, always wait to be assigned to service. There are certain services to which you may assign yourself. A recruiting officer in Christ's army requires no commission. The work of gathering in them that are without is one of the most important kinds of work, and that is best done without definite plan, as opportunity offers. When you meet those who have no regular place of worship ask them to come to church with you. Tell them that you will wait for them at the door, and see that they are provided with a seat. Make them feel that they will be welcome if they come, and when they come, make them feel that they are welcome. Have this word of invitation always in your mind and lose no opportunity of speaking it.

Men are not saved by going to church, but going to church is a means of grace, and it is a most useful work to bring those who now neglect it to avail themselves of it. Recruit for the Sunday school and the prayer-meeting also. If you attend a good meeting, remember it and mention it to those who were not there. If they see that these social services have kindled a flame of sacred love in your heart, perhaps they will want to come and warm themselves by the same fire.

Of course this implies that you will attend yourself upon these services. By your constant presence, you will do what you can to sustain them. They also serve who only stand and are counted. That is sometimes a most momentous duty. And they who can always answer "Here" when the roll of the battalion is called, are in that very act most useful helpers. Concerning your active participation in these services I shall have something to say hereafter. I only wish now to urge the importance of giving them your countenance—not metaphorically, but literally. There are a great many little services that need to be performed in connection with every

church, services which fall to nobody in particular and which will be neglected unless there be vigilant eyes to look out for them and willing hands to undertake them. There is a good deal of business to be done which is everybody's business. You know what the proverb is. Let me suggest to you a better reading: What is everybody's business is nobody's, and what is nobody's business is mine. Look after the little duties that other people are likely to neglect.

There is one other work which you may safely assign yourself. That is the work of promoting acquaintance and good fellowship in the congregation to which you belong. Appoint yourself a member of the welcome committee. Make it a point to speak a polite and pleasant word not only to those who worship regularly with you, but to occasional visitors and especially to strangers.

"James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad *greeting*." That is the way the grand old apostle begins his encyclical letter. Thank God for James and the first verse of his

epistle! Get it by heart and carry it in the grip of your hand and the look of your face wherever you go, but especially when you go to church!

My friends, that is a noble and inspiring service to which we are called by the church to which we belong. To build it up and strengthen it; to beautify not only the place of God's sanctuary but also the spiritual house of which it is the shelter; to labor in season and out of season to make the church that is precious to God honorable in the sight of men,—this is a work that may well call forth the enthusiasm of every man to whom the highest things are dear. There is no kind of labor in which we can engage whose result will last so long, and tell so powerfully on the good of those who shall come after us, as that which we give to the edifying of the body of Christ.

The collegians going forth from the halls of their Alma Mater, plant—each class of them—a vine that shall climb upon the walls and clothe them with greenness in the summer, and with purple robes in the autumn, so that life, tarrying after they are gone and building for them shall help to decorate the places that have grown so

dear. Let it be ours, my friends, to plant some seed of truth, or some germ of love, that shall live and grow after we have gone, rising from the foundations of that spiritual house which is our home, entwining itself through all its sacred forms, through all its solemn ministries, and helping to clothe it with beauty and with glory in the centuries to come.

IV.

THE CHRISTIAN AS A WITNESS.

We have had, of late, a good deal of talk against talk. Carlyle, himself an everlasting talker, set the fashion of denouncing talk; and all the glib little fellows who have nothing to say have been swift to follow it. When there is nothing else to ridicule, a tirade against talk is in order. Doesn't it ever occur to these people that the evil, if evil it be, is not mended by increasing it? that you do not cause the flood to abate by emptying your own dipperful into its swollen current?

Let us have this topic treated with a little discrimination. The cant about silence is as offensive as any other kind of cant. There is a time to keep silence, doubtless; and there is also a time to speak.

Of insincere talk there is reason enough to complain. When a man speaks what he does

not believe, when his acts steadily belie his words, we may well refuse to hear him. Against foolish talk, random talk, talk that expresses no careful thought, we may also wisely protest. It is fair to demand that he who speaks shall have something to say.

No one can deny that the gift of speech is easily and frequently abused. The best gifts are the most liable to abuse. But to disparage speech is to set at nought one of the crowning distinctions between man and the lower animals, to make light of the noblest faculty that God has given to men. And, after all this cant about silence, it remains true that speech furnishes the vehicle by which thought travels, the wings by which love flies. Is not the sword of the spirit "*the word* of God?" "Talking!"—says one, "it is the only force that moves the world. Voting changes no opinions—it only records them. It is talking and nothing else—the mere foolishness of preaching, that makes up the skirmishes and the battles of our crusades of politics and science and morals and religion."

Of what are our Congresses of natural and social science, our educational conventions, and

boards of trade, made up, if not of talk? What is the work of the teacher, if it is not talking? And even in the household how large a part of the best training is accomplished through the agency of judicious and well-chosen words. Here, of course, more than almost anywhere else, the words of the parent must be enforced by his life; yet there is need of line upon line and precept upon precept in order that the laws of good conduct may be impressed upon the memories of our children.

Now the work of Christ in the world, which we as Christians are called to do, is done not by the neglect, but by the use of this instrument of speech. It is not all done by talking, as I have already tried to show, but the emphasis which is put upon preaching in the injunctions of Christ to his disciples, and in the whole of the New Testament, makes it plain that a very large part of it is done in this way. But preaching, in the New Testament sense of the word, is not always the formal delivery of truth by an orator to a congregation; it is any utterance, no matter how familiar or conversational, by which the truth of the Gospel is communicated. Two men

are riding together along a desert road in a wagon, and one of them is said to preach to the other. "Daily in the temple and *in every house*," the historian of the Acts tells us, the disciples "ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ." I do not suppose that Philip, when he preached to the eunuch, or that the apostles when they preached from house to house in Jerusalem, laid out their discourses with a firstly and a secondly and a thirdly, or that they raised their voices in a preaching tone, or that they held forth solemnly while their auditor or audi tors listened silently. It was not always monologue, when Christ and his apostles preached; it was often dialogue. Talk as well as speech-making comes under the head of preaching. And indeed, the best kind of speech-making, as we are beginning to learn, is that which, by its natural and familiar style, most closely resembles talk.

It is highly important, then, that the young Christian learn to talk well. That is an art which he is bound to cultivate, the art of expression. Let him not be misled by the prating against talk of a few garrulous people who

themselves want to make all the noise. The confession by the mouth of Jesus Christ as the Saviour, the testimony of the lips to the truth of his gospel, the utterance in words of the call to the heavenly life, are not matters of no consequence, nor are they duties that can be wholly done by the ministers and the deacons, or the college-taught people in the churches. "Let him that heareth" not only come but "*say* Come!"

Paul gave thanks for the Corinthian Christians, not for the ministers but for the people, that in everything they were enriched by Jesus Christ, *in all utterance*, as well as in all knowledge. It is not less a matter of congratulation in these days when Christians learn to use the gift of speech wisely and well.

By the use of speech truth is imparted, but that is only one of the benefits that flow from it. By the use of speech our own ideas are cleared and sharpened. No man knows anything very well till he has tried to express it. Every schoolmaster will testify that he has learned more about the sciences in which he gives instruction by teaching them to others than by studying

them for himself. The best way to make a thing plain to your own mind is to explain it to somebody else. Action and reaction are equal, and therefore expression is balanced by impression. In all mental commerce it is better to give than to receive, because one gains in giving more than in receiving. The very effort to put your thought about religious truth and the religious life into intelligible words must, then, have the effect to strengthen your possession of that truth and your hold upon that life.

Moreover your ideas will be likely to undergo revision if you speak them out. Not unlikely some of them are wrong. When you utter them in conversation, the questions with which they may be met and the doubts that may be expressed about them will perhaps result in correcting them. Talking implies listening. He who talks well receives as well as imparts. He may not gain so much from what is said to him as from what he himself expresses; but if he is candid and modest he can hardly help learning something in every conversation. And if he is able to express his own thoughts clearly, those who hear will almost surely be stimulated to re-

plies that will throw light upon the subject of which he speaks. "He that watereth shall be watered also himself." Not only correction of error, but also mental and spiritual enlargement and inspiration are to be gained in conversation

As a means of culture, then, and also as a means of usefulness, the Christian is bound to exercise his gift of speech. A large part of the good that we receive will come through talk; much of the good that we do will be done through talk. Much of it, I say; not all of it, not most of it, but much of it. We have a right to be impatient with those people who seem to think that talk is the panacea for all the ills of life, that there is no other kind of Christian work except speech-making; but when we refuse to accept these extravagant notions, we need not deny that speech is one of the weightiest instruments in the propagation of truth; we need not neglect the duty of keeping this instrument in order for effective service.

In order that one may talk usefully, it is highly important that one should know something. The graces of speech are barren when divorced from the gifts of knowledge. Mere

elegances of diction are of small account; a faultless pronunciation and an absolute accuracy of grammatical construction only make the speech that comes from an empty head sound all the more hollow. If the speaker only know something; if by his study of the Word, and of himself, and of nature and of society, and of God's providential order, he have learned something of the nature of the Redeemer's kingdom, something of those deep mysteries that unfold themselves only to the humble and thoughtful student of divine truth, then, no matter though his sentences may be rudely constructed, and his words barbarously pronounced, we may sit at his feet as delighted and profited listeners. I do not mean that there is any merit in bad grammar, —quite the contrary; but the defect is one that can far more easily be borne than a lack of understanding.

In order that we may be qualified to talk well in public or in private upon religious subjects, the study of good books is a great help, and none of us can afford to neglect it. Some underwise people, ministers even, affect to despise the knowledge that comes

through books, and pretend to draw all their inspirations from the incidents and associations of common life; but a mere horse-car or ferry-boat culture is not apt to be very exalted, and the sermons of the preacher who never reads are likely to be more sensational than stimulating. What the minister needs is needed also, in some less degree, by every layman who wants to be useful. The best minds of the ages have left for us their legacies of priceless wisdom in the books that they have written; guidance and comfort are in the words that hold the results of their experience, and we are not wise if we refuse the counsel and support bequeathed to us. I find a few friends wherever I go, whose wide experience and clear insight and commanding convictions make me a large debtor whenever I talk with them; but in my study any day I can sit down with Pascal, or with Coleridge, or with Dr. Arnold, or with Robertson, or with Bushnell; I can have him all to myself, in silence; I can commune with him more perfectly and with larger gains of wisdom and knowledge than I could hope to receive in any oral intercourse with any man, and when the interview is ended,

I feel that I have been lifted on the wings of a mighty spirit up to heights where the outlook is wider than that of my daily path in life, and the air is purer than that which I breathe in the market-place. Such a season of communion with a great soul always gives me something to think about, and something to talk about. I do not despise the light that I find on lowly ways; the stimulus and help that come to me in conversations with those who have written no books, but whose lives are full of the fruits of a sweet and sincere piety; one needs both kinds of knowledge, that which is gained from books and that which is gained in daily life; intercourse with common people and with uncommon people. I only desire to insist that for all of us who desire to qualify ourselves to be useful, this means of improvement is open; and that while, on account of the burden of daily cares, many are not able to read as much as they would like to read, there are yet odd moments in the busiest lives that can be put to good use in this way. Thus by our communion with the wise and the good, we may get wisdom and understanding that shall qualify us to speak acceptable words,

when we sit in the house, when we walk by the way, and when we stand up in the assembly of worshippers to bear witness of the truth.

I have not spoken of the study of the Bible, as a means whereby we may prepare ourselves to talk of things divine, because I desire to devote part of another chapter to the uses of this holy Book. But it is evident that all that has been said concerning the value of good books applies with greatly added force to the Bible, which is the best of books. None of us can expect to speak wisely or convincingly of things divine if we neglect the sacred oracles.

It is not, however, wholly by the reading of good books, not even by the study of the Bible, that we perfect ourselves in the Christian art of talking. We must think, as well as read. We must meditate on what we read, and what we hear, and what we see. We must try to apply these truths of religion to life as we witness it, and as we are living it; to work out the problems of grace in our daily experience, and observation. There is time for most of us to do a good deal of honest thinking about religious truth. Many of those who cannot read much

have plenty of time to think. And they who read a little and think much are often wiser than they who read much and think but little. What we all need, in order to qualify us to speak understandingly and forcibly about these themes, is daily meditation upon them. The reason why many of us cannot speak on religious subjects, or can only speak drily and clumsily, is that we do not think much about them. We should not find it easy to talk about politics if we thought no more about politics than we do about religion. We should not find it hard to talk about religion if we thought as much about religion as we do about politics.

Add to meditation practice. He who lives well can generally talk well. Even if he does not say much, what he does say means a great deal. The reduction of these truths of religion to the terms of daily life puts us into such thorough possession of them that when we speak our words like our Master's in some smaller measure are spirit and life; and we are listened to as those having authority and not as the scribes.

When you have thus by study, by medita-

tion, by consistent practice, got something to say and a right to say it, then open your mouth and speak. You need not wait until you have read all the books, or until you have thought over all possible subjects of reflection, or until you have become perfect in your Christian lives; but while you study, while you think, while you faithfully live, give utterance to the thought that is in you. Talk about religion. Make it a common and a familiar topic. Don't be afraid to talk about it. You who fear the Lord speak often one to another! Do not lecture one another; do not preach to one another; but converse about the religious life, as you are endeavoring to live it; about your own experiences in applying the truth of the New Testament to your daily conduct; about your successes and your failures, your doubts and your encouragements, your hopes and your fears. Compare notes. There will be some things in your experience of which you will not desire to speak; of which you will have no right to speak. There are bounds of reticence that must not be transgressed. There are inner struggles through which we must pass with no counsel and no sympathy

save that of him who in Gethsemane agonized for our deliverance. But of many phases of our Christian life we may freely speak to our Christian friends, and our communion with them may be helpful to them as well as to ourselves.

Do not be afraid to talk about religion with those who are not Christians. It is not necessary, however, for you to lecture *them*. It is not best to go at them in a formal, official sort of way, as if you had a duty to discharge, and felt bound to do it, whether they liked it or not. You can converse on the subject of religion with a man without "giving him a talking to." That is what few of us enjoy, be the subject what it may. When you assume by your air and tone that you are in some sense superior to the person with whom you are conversing,—that you a saint, have come to him a sinner, to reclaim him from the error of his ways, you immediately put him into the attitude of resistance. Of course you do not feel any such superiority, and your method of approach should not convey such an impression. Talk with him, not to him. Draw him out. Get him to tell you what his thoughts of the religious life are,

(for all of our neighbors have thoughts about it,) and what his purposes and experiments have been in trying to live religiously, (for there are very few who have not at some time in their lives tried to be Christians.) Perhaps you can help him out of his difficulties; if you cannot you may be the means of putting him into communication with some one who can. At any rate you can show your interest in him, and your desire to do him good, and you can make him see that you have no wish to dictate to him, or to exalt yourself above him.

You must not, however, be obtrusive. Do not force this kind of conversation at unseemly times, and in rude ways.

When you talk, talk naturally. You require no holy tones, and no theologic phrases. There is no call for cant. Be cheerful about it. Don't give any color to the notion that religion is a gloomy subject; that it can never be mentioned without bringing a shadow upon the face and a drone into the voice. Let your talk be talk, not snuffling, nor wailing, nor maundering. And if with a hearty good will, and a cheerful confidence in the truth of what you are saying, you

thus beside all waters sow the seeds of truth divine, doubtless you shall come again with rejoicing bringing your sheaves with you.

But there is need, sometimes, of talk in public places, in prayer and conference meetings, and in other public meetings for religious purposes. If these social religious meetings could be made less formal and more social, so that the exercises should more resemble a familiar but decorous conversation, and be less like a series of set speeches, the result, I am sure, would in many cases be beneficial. If each person, male or female, would feel free without rising to put in a sentence or two pertinent to the theme or the occasion, our conferences would often be greatly enriched. Often, the substance of what one has to say is summed up in one or two sentences. Amplification only weakens it. Tersely put it sticks in the memory and quickens the feeling. If we could have more of these sententious and informal utterances our meetings would be greatly improved, and many who now shrink from participating in them might do so with profit to themselves and to the rest of us.

But even such short sayings must have thought in them and life behind them. Some preparation is necessary, even for this unpretentious service. And this preparation should be carefully made. None of us should wait until the meeting, and then expect a sudden inspiration. Beaten oil in the sanctuary makes the flame burn brightly; and it matters not whether the candlestick be set in the pulpit or in the prayer-room. I believe in inspirations, most heartily; but I believe that they come to those who work, not to those who shirk. When I have been lazy in my preparation for the pulpit, then I cannot be confident that the Lord will do my work for me; but when I have been diligent in making ready for the service I am always sure that he will stand by me and help me to preach his word. And the same rule must, I am sure, hold good of those who speak in the prayer-meetings. We do not need to prepare set speeches—far from that; but we do need to be thinking during the week of the subject of which we will speak; of the truth to which we will bear witness; and we ought to be in readiness to utter it clearly and promptly. If we

can condense it into a very few words, so much the better.

It is not, however, always possible to reduce what we have to say to a sentence. Sometimes several sentences will be required to convey our thought. And the power to stand on his feet and utter these sentences with distinctness is one that every young Christian ought to cultivate. The gifts of the orator are not for all, but the ability to express, with clearness and simplicity, any truth that we may happen to know, may be acquired by all of us. It is harder for some than for others to gain this power, but it is not beyond the reach of any. Some are naturally diffident; but repeated and persistent and determined effort, with faith in God's help, will overcome this diffidence. First be sure that you have something to say, and that you know what that something is; then arise and say it. If what you are trying to say is the truth, if you have verified it in your experience, then it is a message which God has given you, and no doubt he will help you to utter it. Believe that he will. Expect his spirit to speak through you, and be not dismayed if you seem to fail; for

the broken utterances of his feeblest children are often by his convincing power applied to the consciences of those who hear. Even though you may succeed but imperfectly in giving utterance to your thought, try it again, and keep trying until your timidity disappears, and the service becomes a joy. Make ready, every time, the word that you will utter, pray every time, that God will help you to utter it; expect always his presence and his sustaining grace and you will gain, at length, this excellent gift of clear and helpful speech.

V.

THE CHRISTIAN IN BUSINESS.

I ONCE heard a man, who was reputed to be a trickster in trade, say in a prayer meeting, that what we wanted most was more religion in our business. Coming from such a man I confess that the utterance somewhat puzzled me. Two possible explanations suggested themselves. One was that the speaker was unjustly accused of dishonesty—that he was not the untruthful and scheming fellow that common rumor made him out to be. That was the most charitable, and I would fain hope, the most credible theory. It might be, however, that by carrying our religion into our business this man meant *talking* religion in business hours and in business places, rather than practicing it in the transactions of trade. It might be that his idea of mixing religion with business was conversing with your customers over the counter in a confidential manner about

their souls; keeping the Bible in the money-drawer, and reading a verse or two from it now and then, for your own edification or for the benefit of persons happening in; putting a little Scripture into an advertisement, or slipping a tract into a parcel of goods, or printing a text upon the envelope in which you send out your trade circulars. Some such methods as these might have been in his mind when he said that we wanted more religion in our business. His conscience might have reproved him for not resorting to these evangelistic devices more frequently in connection with his trade, while it did not at all trouble him on account of any lies that he might have told, or any sharp tricks that he might have played upon his customers.

It is a melancholy fact that there are a good many people in our churches whose conscience is of just this quality. It is punctilious about deeds of piety, it is careless about works of righteousness. I do not say that such people are never Christians; sometimes they are, no doubt; they really mean to do right, and their failure is due to an imperfect education more than to conscious and intentional hypocrisy.

Their method of mixing business with religion will however, scarcely approve itself to any well instructed conscience.

I do not say that a business man should never seize upon the opportunities that come to him in business intercourse of speaking on the subject of personal religion. Such occasions will present themselves, and he who is ready to do good to all men as he has opportunity will not neglect them. Ordinary common sense will however, suggest one or two maxims that may well be observed by those who undertake to do good in this way. The first is that the merchant or clerk who talks religion to a customer, must be sure that the customer has entire confidence in his integrity as a man of business. The word of exhortation is not likely to be mixed with faith in them that hear it, if it is spoken by the lips of one to whom suspicions of sharp practice have somehow attached themselves.

The second is, that the imputation of making gain of godliness ought not to be incurred. If our zeal for religion has the appearance of being a device to get the favor of a certain class of customers, it will do more harm than good.

On the whole, therefore, while I do not doubt that it may sometimes be the duty of the business man to use the intercourse between himself and his customers for evangelistic purposes, it seems to me that there are other ways in which a Christian man may more successfully introduce his religion into his business. It is not so much by making the store or the office or the shop a preaching place, as by making it a practicing place, that he most conclusively proves the gospel true. If in all his transactions the fact appears that his conduct is guided by strict integrity, his religion will get abundant honor.

The Christian in business is, then, first of all, an upright man. He is one on whose word all his neighbors unhesitatingly depend; he is one who is never known to take an unfair advantage in a bargain; he is one who "sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not." The Christian man of whom this can be said wins for his Master a meed of respect that few other servants have the power to gain. I know of no man who wields a more powerful influence than the business man who shows that his religion keeps nim scrupulously honest.

The young Christian who has devoted his life to business need not then imagine that he has chosen a calling in which the opportunities of usefulness are limited. There is no more fruitful service than that to which the man is called who practices religion in the midst of the temptations of trade.

The first and most conspicuous of the traits by which the Christian in business will shine forth as a light is truthfulness. This is indeed, the fundamental virtue. In every system of morals, in every estimate of character, we must put truth first. Without veracity and the confidence which rests upon it, society cannot exist. That is the fair bond by which the social order is compacted. "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." Every lie that is told disturbs the security of the neighborhood, and weakens the foundations of the state. Every lie that is told hurts not only the man that tells it, and the man that is deceived by it, but also the whole community; for it helps to impair the confidence of men in one another; and it is upon this basis of confidence that our civilization rests.

Truthfulness, I say, is the virtue to be first cultivated not only by the merchant, but by the laborer, the mechanic, the professional man Even the journalist with all his shining traits can well afford to covet this best gift. The professor of theology, the minister of the gospel, who dissembles or prevaricates in the execution of his trust, who hides the truth that he thinks, and teaches a doctrine that he does not believe; whose words flow on in the channels of tradition, while his convictions have made for themselves another channel out of sight, is surely doing all he can to undermine the faith of men not only in the doctrine that he teaches but in truth itself. Such insincerity will out. It cannot be hid. And when one who stands to unfold the divine oracles is found to be paltering with words in a double sense, or teaching orthodoxy with his lips while his thought is far from it, a terrible blow is dealt at the very foundations of faith in the hearts of men. It is not necessary that every crude questioning, every undigested speculation of the religious teacher should be spoken forth; but when, after fair investigation, he reaches any conclusion respecting religious truth, it is his

duty to utter it, even though it may put him out of sympathy with those to whom he ministers. "Between us be truth," always and by all means. The people may be glad to have their minister agree with them, but they will not, it is to be hoped, be so base as to demand that he should pretend to agree with them when he does not. They will not regard the teacher who insincerely speaks their thought as a better man than the one who sincerely speaks his own. They will not make it perilous for the man to be sincere, by banishing from their presence all who do not voice their convictions. Disagreement is to every honest seeker after truth an evil infinitely less to be dreaded than deceit.

I have dwelt upon the need of truth between the teacher and the taught, because the department is one concerning which I have a right to speak. But I cannot see why the obligation of sincerity does not rest alike upon all men in all callings. Falsehood is the fundamental evil. The Devil is the father of lies. His kingdom rests upon deceit. And it will never be overthrown till all Christians put away lying utterly, and speak every man truth with his neighbor.

Veracity is no more necessary in commercial life than in domestic life or social life, but it is perhaps more difficult to practice the virtue in trade than anywhere else. There are so many motives to lie, there are so many ways of lying, the atmosphere of the market is so charged with falsehood, that it is often very hard to tell the exact truth. The usages and traditions of trade in many quarters are such that one who undertakes to be truthful will find himself rowing right against the current. Not seldom the question of livelihood will be raised if he resists the bad practice.

A young man in this city entered a dry goods store (not now open, I am happy to say) in which a bankrupt stock was being disposed of. But new goods were constantly added to the bankrupt stock, and one of the tricks of the establishment was this. The new goods were all marked twice, a very high price was put upon the tag with ink; then that was marked out with pencil, and a much lower figure was written underneath. The customer was shown this tag by the clerk who was required to say, "Here! you can see what Mr. So and So was selling these goods for

and what a reduction we have made." The young man did not think this method of doing business exactly honorable, but I am sorry to say that he had not the moral courage to refuse to do it. It takes some moral courage to do just right always in hard times like these, when situations are not plenty, and the prospect of long idleness, if not of starvation, opens before every man who loses his place. Nevertheless, the case is very plain. No man can afford to lie. That, in the long run, is the most expensive and the most ruinous of all indulgences. And especially is the Christian restrained by his vows of allegiance to Him who is the Truth, from such baseness. It takes some moral courage to tell the truth, but I should think that it would require some immoral courage in a Christian man to lie, right before God and the angel that is writing in the book of life; right under the sad reproving look of Him who came to bear witness to the truth, and who cannot, surely, witness without pain the falsehoods of his disciples.

No, my friend, it will not do to lie The employer who requires it of you is a man whom you cannot afford to work for. Shake off the

dust of your feet for a testimony against him and go. Trust in the Lord and do right and you will be better off, even in this world, than if you trust in the devil and do wrong. But there is no conceivable privation or suffering that the Christian man will not gladly encounter sooner than be guilty of untruth.

Let this law of truthfulness be your guide in all your business life, whether you are principal or agent, merchant or clerk. Don't suppose that you are absolved from blame when you employ another to do wrong or when you are employed by another to do wrong. If you consent to it, you are responsible for it. Never misrepresent the quality of what you are selling, never be silent if you know that one with whom you are dealing is deceived to his detriment. If you know that the article appears to him to be what it is not, undeceive him. If the label on the goods lies, whether as to quantity or quality, (and most labels do) expose the falsehood before the goods pass from your hands. Have no part nor lot in the abominable trickeries by which the trade of the world is infested. Do your utmost to expose them, to prevent

them, to make them disgraceful and unprofitable. If as a Christian man you can succeed in raising, though it be only in a small degree, the standard of truthfulness among the business men of the community in which you live, in making veracity more honorable and deceit more despicable, you will be helping mightily to build up the kingdom of your Redeemer in the world.

Closely connected with this virtue of truthfulness is the virtue of honesty. The honest man must be truthful; the truthful man can hardly be dishonest. He who recognizes and respects his neighbor's right to the truth is not likely to trespass against any other of his neighbor's rights. It is not safe for a man to steal who will not lie; he is sure to be caught at it. A thief who was not also a liar would be a moral curiosity. If the foundation of character be laid in truthfulness, there is therefore no doubt but that the life that is built upon it will be an honest life; nevertheless, it is well for the young Christian to remember that his religion does imply not only sincerity of speech, but carefulness to respect other people's rights of property In a good many small things it is the way of the

world to be dishonest; but the Christian hears his Master saying: "He that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." One cannot be too scrupulous in such matters.

The private secretary of the late Chief Justice Chase told me that during the whole of his official life at Columbus as Governor of Ohio he always kept a separate stock of stationery and stamps, for his own private correspondence, and never used the supply furnished him by the State except for official business. It was a small matter but it indicated the integrity of the man, which in all the earlier and better part of his life was so illustrious, and which, if toward the close of his life it seemed to be somewhat dimmed only faded with the waning of his mental power Judge Chase's practice was none too strict. In a public officer it seems almost incredible, but whether a man be dealing with the property of the State or with the property of an individual, he can be none too scrupulous about taking that which does not belong to him. Even the Golden Rule will not serve us here. For if we are so careless or so generous as not to be disturbed when others make free with our possessions, that

will not justify us in making free with the possessions of others. I had a neighbor once,—a most obliging man, always ready to do me a favor, and equally ready to help himself without asking to anything that belonged to me. I confess that he was one of the most difficult neighbors to deal with that I ever had. I did not want to warn him off, peremptorily, from my premises; but it was very aggravating to see how little respect he had for my rights as a proprietor; how utterly confused were his notions of mine and thine. This lack of precision in defining and respecting property rights very often leads to gross dishonesty.

Promptness in meeting his engagements is another distinguishing mark of the Christian in business. Truthfulness underlies this virtue also; it is one of the forms in which truthfulness is exhibited. In these days it is sometimes hard for the best of us to be punctual in keeping our promises. "We are members one of another;" and the failure of one neighbor to keep his engagement with me, may make it impossible for me to keep my engagement with another neighbor. I suppose that we must all

be patient; that is one way in which, in these times, we are to bear one another's burdens. But the Christian man will be very careful not to enter into any engagement which he does not see his way clear to fulfil. He will not recklessly take upon himself obligations which he has no visible means of discharging. He will not let his imagination or his hopefulness delude him into making promises which he cannot perform.

Just here, I think, some Christian men who mean to be honest make deplorable mistakes and bring great scandal upon the church. They are altogether too sanguine. They take counsel in their business ventures of their hopes rather than of experience and judgment. And thus they take upon themselves obligations which they never can meet and drag others along with them into loss and suffering. Now it is well to be hopeful, but it is not well to be visionary; and the Christian is bound to cultivate a sound mind, a sober judgment in all these matters, and to be very cautious how he ventures upon any undertaking whose success is not reasonably certain.

Every Christian, whether engaged in com-

mercial pursuits or not, ought to be sure that he knows what his income is, and ought to be careful that his expenditures do not exceed it, unless he has a surplus on which he can draw. He who, with nothing laid by, is spending more than he is earning, is living at somebody else's expense. This may sometimes be necessary, but when it is done there ought to be a fair understanding. Those who are thus assisting us ought to know just what they are doing; then, if they are able and willing to continue the assistance, and we are willing to accept it, nobody will have any complaints to make.

Fidelity to trusts is another form in which Christianity displays itself in business. The property of others is sometimes committed to our care. It then becomes our duty to deal with it much more carefully than if it were our own, to refrain especially from any use of it which the owner himself would not approve. We have no right to employ it in any private speculations. We have no right to *use* it unless there is a distinct understanding to that effect. Money for charitable purposes or money belonging to social organizations, that comes into your hands

ought to be kept sacredly separate from your personal and private funds. It is not right to use it, trusting that you will be able to replace it. No matter how fair the prospect may be of making this restoration, you cannot be sure of anything in the future, and the only safe way is not to touch a penny of it.

The appropriation of trust funds is a crime which has been increasing in frequency of late. Many shocking instances of this kind of infidelity on the part of professing Christians have come to light. The treasurer of one of our leading benevolent societies was accustomed not long ago to receive funds entrusted to him for investment. Several poor widows put their little all into his hands, and some of the missionaries of the American Board, who had saved a little money, sent it to him to be safely placed.

Instead of putting it into good securities he used it to set up a dissolute son of his in business at the West, and every dollar of it was sunk. One good and well-known missionary lost the small savings of a life-time by this infidelity.

Now between an act like this and that of the

burglar who blows open your safe with nitroglycerine and runs away with your bonds deposited there, I confess the burglar's operation seems to me a good deal more respectable. Such a reckless and irresponsible use of trust funds is one of the gravest of crimes. Yet I suppose that this man had accustomed himself to taking other people's money for his own use or for speculation and replacing it afterward, till he had come to feel that it was a perfectly legitimate transaction. The ethics of financial trust need to be revised and enforced with all solemnity upon every man who stands in this relation. "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful," that he keep, sacredly, that which is entrusted to him, and that he refrain from using it for private or speculative purposes.

Closely connected with this is the question whether it is the duty of a bank officer to defend with his life the property entrusted to him. I cannot doubt that it is. At any rate, the bank officer has no right, I am sure, to assist in robbing the bank. He had better sacrifice his life than be a thief or the partner of thieves. The soldier guarding the arsenal who should be cap-

tured and threatened with death if he would not open to the enemy the building he was set to guard and aid them in pillaging it, would be execrated if he should save his life by such an act of baseness. I see not why the honor of a bank officer ought not to be as sacred as the honor of a soldier.

Finally, the Christian in business will prove that his religion is genuine by making his business always subordinate and tributary to his religion. He will not feel that business is the principal thing; he will not act as if he thought that the gains of trade are of more consequence than the treasures laid up in heaven. If "a Christian in business," be the title that describes him, the emphasis will rest on "Christian," rather than on "business." He will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, believing that all needful things will be added after that. "Not slothful in business," says Paul; but that is a measured phrase, a negative phrase: "fervent in spirit serving the Lord;" that is an energetic phrase, a positive phrase. There is no testimony by which the Christian business man can more strongly support the faith which he has

professed, than by *showing* to all those with whom he deals that the concerns of religion are dearer to him than those of traffic; that he is more ready to forego a business advantage than a Christian duty. And not only by keeping business under, and giving religion the supreme place in his life will he win honor for his Master, but also and most effectively by using his business benevolently, by conducting it not solely with an eye to personal aggrandizement, but also as a means of serving others. We are all able to see in a time of depression like the present, how great is the service that the man renders to his neighbors who is able to give them employment, by which they may gain a livelihood. I know some good Christian gentlemen who have engaged in business of late for this reason, because they desired to provide work for those who were idle. It is a most excellent and Christian thing to do, and I trust this method of doing good will become more and more popular. When Christian business men generally begin to comprehend this truth, that the enterprises in which they are engaged may be and ought to be carried on with benevolent thoughts; that the

faculty of organizing business is one of the talents of which a Christian use must be made; that the people in their employ are not their foes nor their menials, but their brethren beloved, in whose welfare they have a special interest, for whose good in all things, temporal and spiritual, they are especially to care, the kingdoms of this world will speedily become the kingdoms of Jehovah and of his Christ. This realm of mammon, with its selfish maxims and its sordid tendencies and its fierce competitions, is now the stronghold of the world's evil, and the only force that can successfully lay siege to it and take it for Christ is a consecrated army of Christian business men.

VI.

THE CHRISTIAN IN SOCIETY.

THE Christian is a member of society. Not only does he belong to that larger society which constitutes the state, but also to that smaller community which is gathered in the city or the village or the rural district where he dwells. This is not a close corporation, into which none are admitted save by the vote of those already belonging; it is not even a body politic, limiting by rules more or less wise the rights of citizenship: it is a natural organism into which every human being is born; and the duties that pertain to it are no more optional than are our duties to God. The individual has no more power of determining whether or not he will be a member of society than the hand has of determining whether or not it will be a member of the body. The hermit is not absolved from social obligations; he may forswear them, but he cannot

escape them no matter how deep the seclusion into which he may be plunged.

It is not left with any one to choose whether he will be a member of society or not. Is the drop requested to choose whether it will be a part of the river, or the twig to make up its mind whether it will belong to the tree? Here you are in society; and you are *of* it, as well as in it; into its relations and its obligations you were born and you will not escape from them until you die nor even then.

What then is the nature of the debt which the Christian owes to society? Simply and comprehensively, it is the debt of love: "As we have opportunity therefore, let us do good to all men." Our best opportunities of doing good are those which grow out of our relations to the people who live in our own immediate neighborhood. To secure their welfare, to promote their happiness, to improve, in all laudable ways, the conditions of their life—this is our duty to them. The community in which we live has interests which we ought to consider and help in advancing. Of course its religious interests are paramount, and the Christian will make these his

peculiar care. But there are other things that he is bound to care for. If all his neighbors were converted, and were walking in the fear of the Lord, his duties to society would not be ended; they would be only just begun. A great many things can be done for the good of the saints that are in the earth; to improve their circumstances and to cheer and brighten their lives. And Paul says that we are to do good not only to the saints but to all men as we have opportunity.

How, then, is the Christian to discharge this debt of love that he owes to the society in which he lives? After he has performed his religious duties in what other ways can he do good to his neighbors?

In the first place he ought to do all that he can to promote the health of the neighborhood in which he lives. Health is of all things temporal the chief good; life is a burden without it and earthly possessions and gains are of small account when it is wanting. The apostle prayed for the well-beloved Gaius that he might prosper and be in health, even as his soul prospered. You may well pray and labor, too, for those

whose souls are prosperous that their bodies may be sound. It is not true that *all* moral evil has its source in physical disease, but it is true that a considerable part of the sin as well as of the suffering of this world is directly connected with morbid bodily conditions. Whoever helps, therefore, to improve the general health of the neighborhood,—to banish malaria, to guard against infection, to provide good drainage and good water, to make all the surroundings wholesome and salubrious, is doing part of his duty as a Christian in society.

In the second place the Christian is bound to do what he can toward improving the morals of the neighborhood in which he lives. He does this first and most effectively by himself obeying the moral law; by speaking truth and doing justice and by keeping himself pure from the pollutions of vice. But he must also bear witness against the evil as it appears in the community, and do his utmost to create a public sentiment by which it shall be exterminated. As he meets his neighbors day by day, he will stir up their pure minds to abhor the wrong, and to make war upon it. And when the conflict

comes, as it often does come, between vice and virtue in the community; when a determined and organized effort is made to check the ravages of wickedness, then he will be ready to fight as well as talk; to take risks and endure hardships if need be in the service of social virtue. He is a very poor sort of Christian who is not outspoken and aggressive in his championship of morality, and in his hostility to disorder and corruption. "Ye that fear the Lord hate evil." The Christian is bound to cultivate hatred of evil as well as love of goodness and to exercise this grace by grappling with the evil, as it intrenches itself in society, and makes war upon the peace and welfare of his neighbors.

Again, the Christian in society will seek to promote intelligence. Knowledge is a gift that he will covet for himself, and that he will be glad to see conferred upon his neighbors. He will be deeply concerned for the interests of a true and generous culture in the community in which he lives. He will desire that it may be an enlightened community. He knows that ignorance is the parent of superstition, of jealousy, of all unkindness. He knows that every truth

is God's truth; that every true word is God's word; and he believes that the entrance of God's word giveth light, that it giveth understanding to the simple. Therefore he seeks to let light into all dark places, and all clouded minds; and does whatever he can to increase the brightness of the beam that shines from science, or from history, or from philosophy or from literature, into the daily life of the people among whom he dwells. There are many things that we can do as individuals or by voluntary associations to promote culture in the community. We can improve our own minds, for one thing, by reading and study, so that our conversation may be stimulating and helpful to others. If we would furnish ourselves with something to talk about, so that when the weather and the hard times and the election news are exhausted as topics of conversation we need not resort to gossip, but might be able to impart something really instructive and enlightening, we could do a valuable missionary work in a quiet way, on behalf of culture. "To do good and to communicate forget not," says an apostle, "for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." "To com-

municate" what? Charity, no doubt, where charity is needed; sympathy when sympathy is called for; and always thoughts, wise thoughts, high thoughts; truths that kindle the better life within; that strengthen the soul's hope and widen its horizon.

Then there are numberless ways in which we may aid in spreading knowledge among our neighbors, and in quickening their thirst for it. By encouraging the dissemination of a pure literature, by helping to establish libraries and reading rooms, by joining in the patronage of useful lectures, by forming circles for reading and study, so that the leisure hours may be given to the enriching of the mind rather than to its impoverishment, as they so often are,—by all such methods we may prove ourselves friends of knowledge, and worthy laborers in that fruitful field where light is sown for righteousness. In such ways and in every way the Christians of the community ought to be known as the apostles of true culture, as children of the light.

Beauty as well as truth claims the countenance of the Christian in society. God has made everything beautiful in its season. God

loves beauty. It is one of the divine attributes. And we who are his children will honor him if we do what we can to fill the homes and the hearts of the people among whom we live with the beauty that helps in some degree to reveal God to them.

It is also a Christian duty to promote acquaintance and sociableness among neighbors. Not only ought members of the same church to know one another, but people living in the same neighborhood owe one another friendly offices, and ought to meet now and then, for purely social purposes. Our churches claim much of our time and sometimes exhaust our good fellowship, but it seems to me that our fraternal intercourse should overflow the limits of church relationship, that we may not seem to be sectarian and exclusive in our religious life. In every community, whether it be city or village or farming district, much may be done by the exercise of a kindly hospitality and by the cultivation of a social spirit to make life pass pleasantly and to lighten the burden of daily care. If our social assemblies could always be without parade or formality; if they

were less devoted to the exhibition of finery and more to the cultivation of friendliness; if they were not so vulgarly expensive in the ordering as they sometimes are, but were more homelike and unpretentious in their style, they might be very useful. And the Christian in society will, if he is an intelligent Christian, use all his influence to restore to the social life of the community where he lives these simpler manners.

In these gatherings for social purposes and in other places diversions of one sort or another will be provided, and it is the duty of the Christian to assist in providing these, and by participating in them to preserve them from the abuses that often infest them. Recreations and amusements are not only not necessarily sinful, they are indispensable adjuncts of social life. Young people need them and so do old people; the rich want them, and not less do the poor. The business man, loaded with cares and goaded by anxieties, requires occasional relaxation · the laboring man, whose toil is monotonous, and whose life is desolate, wants some pleasant pastime now and then in which he can forget himself. Rest is not enough; the mind needs

diversion. There is excellent tonic in "a good time" for the jaded and anxious worker. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Experience teaches that people will have amusements. They cannot do without them. And it is therefore the duty of the Christian in society to take hold of this department of life and Christianize it. The thing can be done—there is no doubt about it,—and it must be done. It is quite vain for Christians to stand aloof from all the diversions of society, complaining of the evils connected with them; they must enter heartily into them, and guard them against the evils. What is more, they must learn to use a little common sense in their treatment of all these questions of amusement, and when a pastime, in itself innocent, is badly abused, they must direct their censure not at the pastime but at the abuse. It is sometimes a great service to reclaim a diversion that has fallen into the hands of the devil, and to show how it may be harmlessly and helpfully used. That makes the good apparent and the evil also manifest, and establishes a principle which it is always safe to follow

It is always important that the Christian who enters into society, into the social assemblies and the diversions of the day, go always as a Christian; that he be not subservient to the customs and conventions of society, many of which are foolish and some of which are sinful. He is to govern his conduct not always by the usages of society but always by the law of Christ. When the two come into conflict he can never hesitate for a moment as to which he shall obey. And the man who thus in utter fidelity to the higher law goes out into society and lets his light shine will be as a city set on a hill that cannot be hid.

Some of these interests that I have mentioned, as esthetic culture, sociableness, diversion, can only be cared for by voluntary effort. But those more important ones which I mentioned first, health, morality, and education, are largely entrusted to the care of the laws. Much can be done to promote these interests by private effort and voluntary association; but as our society is at present organized, the government of the town or the city takes upon its shoulders the greater part of the burden. But what is as-

sumed by the government is not withdrawn from the sphere of Christian activity, because the Christian is a citizen, and it is part of his Christian duty to see to it that the government is wisely chosen, and that it faithfully performs its duties. One of the first and most urgent of the duties of the Christian in society is to see that good laws are made and good magistrates elected. There is no better opportunity of doing good than that which presents itself where responsible offices are to be filled. The welfare of the community depends in no small degree upon the men to whom its affairs are entrusted. And the best men do not gravitate into office; they must be put in by main strength and kept in by resolute endeavor. The price of liberty and good government is not only eternal vigilance but eternal courage and eternal sacrifice. The Christian citizen must never think the victory over bad government won; like the battle with sin in his own heart the conflict must be renewed boldly every day.

The Christian in society is, as I said at the beginning, a member of that larger society which we call the state or the nation; and all

that has been said about the duty of securing good laws and good magistrates for the town or the city applies with still greater force to those higher and more responsible relations into which our citizenship in the commonwealth and the republic introduces us. The political duties of a Christian are among the most important duties that he is called to perform. If in any part of his service he needs the wisdom of the Most High to guide him, he needs it when he determines upon his political action. There is great danger that his decision will be influenced by unworthy motives. In every political campaign a great many lies are told. He ought to be intelligent enough to detect and reject the falsehood. In every great national contest the basest passions are continually appealed to, and the most unfair and outrageous misrepresentations of opponents are all the while indulged in. He ought to be upright and honorable enough, not only to resist this onset of hate and spite, but to denounce and repudiate everything that is unfair and dishonorable. In every heated political arena the Christian ought to try to keep a cool judgment and an even temper. I do not

say that he should never feel or manifest indignation, for things will be done which, as an honorable man, he ought to resent, and men will appear as candidates for public favor that ought to have the truth told about them, even if it takes very hard and strong words to tell the whole truth. But a proper indignation at wrongs done or attempted and a proper abhorrence of rascals in office or seeking office, are quite compatible with the utmost fairness to opponents, and the most judicial temper in studying the issues of the campaign. It is generally safe to conclude that the good men are not all in one party nor the bad men all in the other; it is always best to hope that there may be some patriotism and some intelligence among our political opponents. The Christian man ought to remember that Christ's word about judging and being judged, and his rule about doing to others as we would that others should do unto us, hold good even in a presidential year; and that the charity that thinketh no evil, and that rejoiceth not in iniquity, is becoming even in our treatment of political opponents.

With this spirit of moderation and this determination to know the truth, and to put country always above party, the Christian should enter into politics. I can think of few spheres of activity in which there is more need of him. They tell us that the olden times were worse than these; that there was not only more of corruption and chicane in politics during the first two decades of our national life than there is to-day, but that partisanship was more bitter then than it is now. I suppose that this is true, nevertheless it is difficult to conceive how anything could be much viler than the torrent of political agitation that is poured through the land now, every four years. To say that our presidential campaigns as at present conducted are a valuable means of educating the people is to my mind a pitiful absurdity. Educating them in what? In falsehood and hate, if in anything. Fair, intelligent, discriminating discussion of the issues before them they do not get. Each party presents every fact and every consideration that makes for itself and against its opponent, and energetically suppresses every fact and every consideration that makes against

itself and for its opponent. The candid and impartial voter can only weigh two partial and contradictory statements, and seek to strike the balance between them; but how many are there who hear both sides, and weigh both sides? Not one in a hundred.

I cannot but feel that these quadrennial contests are a fruitful source of demoralization, rather than of profit. Not only because of the bribery that is so freely resorted to, not only because of the corrupt bargains that are so often made to secure nominations, but also and chiefly because of the poisoning of the mind of the people at large with false accusations and false theories and the embittering of their hearts with hateful passions. Men learn to take distorted and one-sided views of all political questions: they learn to put the worst possible construction always upon the conduct of their opponents; what is worse, they learn to stand by when outrageous wrongs are done in the interest of the party to which they have attached themselves, and either keep silent or defend the wrong. The optimistic moralists are always inclined to make light of this when it is past. "See," they

say, "how quickly these people that were but a little while ago so hot in their animosities get over their passion!" Yes; but the fact that a man is sober and quiet this morning does not cancel the fact that last night he was drunk and violent. And I do not think it good to be drunk, either with wine or with party passion, even though one may after a while become sober again.

Into this fierce and brutal strife the Christian ought to carry his Christianity; standing always for honor and fair play; for chivalry in the treatment of opponents; for truth and the whole truth against the perversions and concealments of partisans; for all things honest and of good report no matter with what party they may be identified; against all things base and vicious in his own party quite as stoutly as in the other. For such a mixing of religion with politics there is surely an urgent call. And when a little more of the spirit of Christ is infused into our political discussions, we shall find that our religion as well as our politics will be the gainer, that the one will be more vigorous and manly and the other more pure and honorable.

VII

THE CHRISTIAN'S QUIET LIFE.

SERVICE and not sanctification is, as we have seen, the supreme object of the Christian's desire and endeavor. "To serve the present age," this is his high calling. The attainment of a perfect character is not neglected by him, but that is an object to be sought indirectly.

It may be said that character is the supreme thing; that a perfect soul is better than any or all the acts that issue from it; just as the mind of Shakespeare is greater than the sum of all his dramas. That is true. But Shakespeare's wonderful mind was not the result of constant labor expended directly upon his mind. If his mind had been a constant care to him, he would have been a noodle. It was not by nursing his mind but by using his mind, that he became the paragon of poets, and the prince of modern interpreters of human life. The man who devotes

his whole life to the study of his mental processes, and the curing of his mental ailments, and the discovery of the laws of mental hygiene and the practice of mental gymnastics, will probably develop a very pretty little model of a mind, but like the inventor's model engine, it is fitted to look at or to play with, not to use. It is the vigorous and productive use of the mind in the study of truth, in the business of life, that makes the intellectual man.

Happiness like mental culture is missed by those who seek it directly.

"O Happiness, our being's end and aim,"

cries out the unphilosophical Pope. But they who make happiness their being's end and aim, who say to themselves "Go to! let us be happy," are always sure to make themselves miserable. Happiness always flies from those that pursue it; it is found only by those who forge to seek it, and devote their lives to some honest and beneficent labor.

What is true of mental development and of happiness is true also of moral and spiritual perfection. The highest religious culture is not

attained by those who make religious culture the supreme object of their thought and their endeavors. Those Christians whose chief concern is their own spiritual condition, are a very poor sort of Christians. A self-conscious holiness is a contradiction in terms. It is through a self-forgetful service that the highest culture is gained; through a faithful following of Him who came not to minister to himself, not to be ministered unto, but to minister to others; who became King of kings and Lord of lords by his utter self-surrender; and whose highest praise is spoken in the scoffs of his murderers—"He saved others—himself he cannot save."

Nevertheless there are passive virtues as well as active virtues; and there are, or ought to be, many hours in the Christian's life when he is not employed directly in doing good to others, and when he must think of himself—of his own spiritual condition, of the gains and losses of his daily commerce in the heavenly treasures of wisdom and grace and power. There is a time to meditate as well as a time to act; and this quiet life of the Christian, in which his spirit is refreshed and his strength for labor is replen-

ished, is a most essential part of the regimen under which his character is developed. Perhaps many of us do not know so much as we ought about the peace of the still hour, the fruitful growths of the quiet life. I would not say that there is too much service and too little culture. Too much genuine service there cannot be; but there may easily be too much parade of service; too much bustle and noise of doing; too much public service as compared with those more private and unostentatious ministries in which some of the best traits of the Christian character are wholly developed. But while service is the principal thing, and while, if rightly divided and directed, there cannot be too much of it, there may easily be too little of meditation, too little dwelling apart in the secret silence of the mind. Our Lord himself went away more than once from those ministries of love in which his strength was consumed, and climbed the mountain side to spend the night in prayer. If he needed such seasons of repose and refreshment much more do we.

"But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door pray

to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." These words from the Sermon on the Mount are not a prohibition of public prayer or social prayer; they are only a reproof of those who performed their private devotions in public places; who said their prayers on the corners of the streets to be seen of men. It is this ostentatious abuse which our Lord condemns in the verse before the one I have quoted. But these words are the most explicit authority for that quiet life of prayer and meditation of which we have been speaking. The closet hours are to be sacredly set apart and sacredly observed. It is not well to leave this most important business to impulse or caprice. The volitions that lead to it ought to be fenced in with the force of habit. That which is habitual is easy of performance; and a good habit like this may come to rule the soul as firmly as those evil habits do that hold us in painful thrall.

I have spoken already of the uses of reading in preparing us to speak well; but reading is also a good help to those who would think well. There are many books that are not fit compan-

ions for the closet hour; but there are a few with which we may well sit down in the secret place, because they will aid us in calling in our thoughts from the noisy world outside and in fixing them upon the things that are unseen and eternal. It sometimes requires a strong effort of the will to wrench one's attention loose from the cares and interests of this present life; and if we begin the silent hour by simply trying to think good thoughts, the good thoughts may fail to come when we summon them, and thoughts that are unbidden and unprofitable guests may throng in and fill the space that ought to be sacred to devotion. But many whose mental discipline has not been sufficient to enable them to think consecutively and profitably in such a season, can yet fix their attention upon a book, and out of the truth which it contains may draw stimulus and refreshment. And though the book should not occupy all the time set apart for meditation, it may often serve as a bridge over which the Christian may pass from the busy life to the quiet life. Such books as Professor Phelps' "The Still Hour," Miss Dora Greenwell's "The Patience of Hope," and "A Present Heaven"

Dr. J. P. Thompson's "The Holy Comforter," Dr. W. W. Patton's "Spiritual Victory," Dr. E. H. Sears' "Sermons and Songs for the Christian Life," the Sermons of Dr. Bushnell or President Woolsey or President Hopkins or Frederick Robertson or Robert Leighton or Jeremy Taylor; the Life and Letters of Robertson, Pascal's "Thoughts," or Dean Goulburn's "Thoughts on Personal Religion," may lead the studious disciple into that contemplative mood in which the great themes of the immortal life become realities. Novels, even those of most religious intent, are to be eschewed in the hour of meditation; what the soul needs is not excitement nor even exhilaration, but the clearing of its spiritual vision and the strengthening of its pinions for flights above the world of sense.

But while such books as I have named may often serve us well in our quiet hours, there is but one book, after all, that is fit to be the inseparable companion of the closet, and that is the Bible. For instruction, for inspiration, for stimulus, no other words are to be compared with those which we find upon its sacred pages. Not all parts of the Bible are equally adapted to

the uses of the closet; the Psalms and the Book of Job, and the Prophecies of the Old Testament, with the whole of the New Testament, are the portions from which we shall derive most benefit. The Bible in the closet is not to be used as a text-book of theology; it is not by the microscopic method of interpretation that we get the most good from it; we must beware how we place too much stress on a literal rendering of certain texts; it is by a large and free use of the book that its truth is unfolded to us; the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life. To put ourselves in the place of the sacred writer so far as we are able; to feel the impulse that moves him to write—the lift and sweep of his inspiration; to get into the current of the divine thought that is bearing him on; to catch his spirit and see the life that now is and the life that is to come with his eyes—this is the right method for him who uses the Bible as an aid to secret meditation and devotion. At other times and for other purposes it may be well to study the Book critically, grammatically, narrowly, but that is not the way to use it in the closet. It is to our feelings rather than our critical fac-

ulties that it ought to address itself there; the awakening of our desires for better life, the kindling of our hopes, the quickening of our consciences, the enlarging of our faith is the service we then demand of it. And this is obtained, not when we set ourselves up as inquisitors, and controversialists, to cross question the Bible, but when we drink in with reverent faith its holy inspirations, when without setting forth in quest of somewhat upon its pages, we quietly wait and let the truth discover us. We do not always need to seek God in the Bible, for in the Bible God is seeking us, and he will surely find us, if we are ready to be found of him.

To read, and think; to think while we are reading; to pause in our reading for more careful thought; to "mark, ponder, and inwardly digest" the word of truth as it is brought to us whether upon the inspired or uninspired page,—this is a means of grace that we cannot afford to neglect. Not all our thinking however, will be the product of our reading. Life as well as literature will furnish us with profitable themes; the events that happen within our knowledge,

the passages in our daily experience will be fruitful of thought. If we are faithfully endeavoring to apply our religion to our lives, difficult questions will be arising continually, of which we shall need to think; questions of conduct, questions of service. Off hand decisions of problems of duty are often unwise; a fuller investigation of the subject in all its bearings would have resulted in a different judgment. For such careful examination of the doubtful cases arising in our every day practice time is wanted—and the hour of quiet study is the right time.

There is need also of some thorough probing of the inner life; some strict and stern self-judgment. All that I have said about the unwisdom of making one's own spiritual condition the uppermost concern is true. The religious life whose energies are consumed in self-questioning, whose one great concern is expressed in the hymn:

> "Do I love the Lord or no?
> Am I his or am I not?"

is always an unfruitful life. Yet there is a time for careful self-examination, for thorough inspection of the foundations of character. Old

George Herbert's quaint counsel is to be duly heeded:

> "By all means use sometimes to be alone;
> Salute thyself; see what thy soul doth wear;
> Dare to look in thy chest, for 'tis thine own,
> And tumble up and down what thou find'st there."

The comparison of our conduct with our ideals; the measurement of our daily practice by the perfect standard of Christ's law; the fair estimate of our attainments in the light of our opportunities—these are useful exercises. They are not to be too frequently resorted to; the staple of Christian devotion is not self-examination; but in due measure they are profitable. Ask yourself about the temper, whether that is growing less fractious and less sullen; about the will, whether that is growing firmer and steadier in its adherence to right principles and good purposes, and more pliable and gentle when honest opinions collide, and opposing interests are to be harmonized; about the thoughts, whether they are becoming purer, and holier; whether the flocks of evil fancies that were once continually darkening the mind, now return less frequently, and are more quickly driven away

about the disposition, whether that is growing more generous and loving; whether it is easier than once it was to practice self-denial in the small affairs of every day, as well as in the great sacrifices that now and then must be made; whether the foolish vanity that puts the externals of life above its realities, and the foolish pride that leads you to despise those less fortunate than you, and the mean envy and jealousy that sometimes disfigure your characters, and the petty ambitions that often domineer your better natures—whether all these degrading passions are being subdued; ask yourself about the tongue, whether that is getting tamer, slower to censure, swifter to bless; about the appetites, whether they are learning to submit to the sway of the nobler affections and the reason; you will find questions enough doubtless to ask yourself, and if you urge them with thoroughness and answer them with honesty, the inquisition may be fruitful of good.

Such a candid survey of one's own character is pretty certain to discover weak points, easily besetting sins. There are faults of temperament, or faults of training, or faults of habit to

which we are all addicted, and which such an inspection will make us conscious of. And the result ought to be the direction of our efforts at self-discipline toward these weak points. "Especially," says the apostle, (for this is the right reading) "especially" let us guard against "the sin which doth so easily beset us." The weakest point in the defenses is the point that the enemy will assail and it is there that the strongest force must be massed.

But study and reflection and self-examination are not the only occupations of the still hour. It is also, and more especially, the time for prayer. It is well to commune with wise men who have left for us in the books that they have written the record of their own experience; it is well to commune with those holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and whose words, written for our learning, are profitable for doctrine, reproof and instruction in righteousness; it is well to commune with our own hearts in silence as we measure the poor achievements of our lives with the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; but to commune with God himself, to speak distinctly to him and

know that he hears us; to open all our hearts to him in thanksgiving, in confession, in entreaty, in intercession, and be assured that he is more responsive, more sympathetic, more compassionate than the tenderest father, the most loving mother into whose ear the erring but trusting child pours the story of his penitence and his purpose of better living,—this is at once the highest privilege, the greatest honor, and the noblest occupation permitted to mortal men. Public prayer, social prayer, and family prayer are all useful and even indispensable means of grace; but the prayer that most enriches the believer, that brings him into the closest fellowship with his Lord and Master, is that which is lifted up in the secret place. It is when none but God is near, that the heart most freely utters its need, and most strongly urges its petitions. In your closet you can pray for many things that you have no right to speak of in the prayer-meeting, or even at the family altar. The deepest needs of the human soul are often those which none but God can know; the deepest sorrows are those which we can tell none but him; the struggles that are most

decisive in our spiritual warfare are those that are waged when we are left alone, as Jacob was, and wrestle with the Angel of the covenant sometimes even unto the breaking of the day. The Christian who lives without secret prayer, or who prays in secret perfunctorily and drily—just *saying* his prayers and letting that suffice,—is neither a growing Christian nor a working Christian. I doubt whether he is a Christian at all.

Let me offer a word or two of counsel concerning the manner in which this duty of private devotion may best be performed.

1. Be simple and direct in your secret prayer. The grace of simplicity is not to be despised in public prayer; but when we call on God in secret, any formality or elaborateness in our petitions is an offense.

2. Pray audibly. You need not lift your voice to be heard in the street, but it is vastly better to pray not merely in our thoughts but also with words. The utterance of our wants helps to define them. Wishes that merely drift through the mind and never find articulate expression are not apt to be influential in their

effect upon our characters. And prayers on which we are not willing to put the emphasis of utterance are not likely to be effectual prayers. I do not deny that a silent wish, a sincere desire of the soul, unexpressed as well as uttered, may be recognized as genuine prayer and may be answered; but I say that when one enters into his closet to pray to his Father in secret, it is far better that he should put his petition into plain words. "Beware," says Dr. James W. Alexander, "of confining yourself to mental prayer, but in your regular devotions employ audible utterance; for great is the reflex influence of the voice upon the feelings."

3. Be honest in your secret prayer. Do not express any want that you do not feel. Do not confess any fault that you do not mean to forsake. Do not keep anything back. Remember that it is He that searcheth the heart to whom you are speaking. Do we not sometimes while conscious of a fault or a sin ignore it in our devotions, praying all round it, but never mentioning it? We know that we are in the wrong, but we do not mean to forsake the wrong; therefore we choose to pass the matter by in

silence. Such prayers as these must be arid and profitless for they are an abomination to the Lord. If there is a secret fault to which we deliberately cling we cannot expect the favor of him who demands of every worshipper the whole heart.

4. Pray earnestly. The words need not be loud, but the desire should be intense. "The fervent, energetic prayer of a righteous man availeth much." "The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." No listless, drowsy petitioning will serve. The closet is a quiet place, but there are strenuous and mighty forces that do their work in silence.

5. Do not mock God in your prayers. Do not beg him to come to you. You know that he is never far from any soul that seeks him. That prayer is answered before you utter it. Do not ask God to do for you that which he has expressly bidden you to do. How grossly in such prayers as these we abuse his infinite patience. Ask him always to help you; in every strife, in every service, in every simplest act of devotion or obedience you need his help: but do not

beseech him to do your duties for you and to give you without labor those gifts which he has expressly declared shall not be enjoyed except as the fruit of labor.

6. Pray always with special reference to the needs of the day and the hour;—the warfare to be waged, the temptations to be resisted, the work to be done, the sorrow to be borne; put your life into your prayer; and let it be the most real and the most immediate business of your life.

No doubt these seasons of secret devotion will sometimes be seasons of conflict. It was when our Lord was alone in the wilderness that Satan tempted him; and every one who seeks the still hour will be sure to encounter the same adversary. Times of reflection are often times of doubt. While we are pondering the great themes of eternity the unexplained and inexplicable mysteries of the life that is to come will sometimes settle like a thick mist upon our minds and envelop us in bewildering uncertainties Oftener still our own lapses into sin, our failures to keep the vows we have spoken, or to conquer the evils we have tried to overcome

fill us with discouragement, and make us doubt whether there be indeed any truth in this Gospel we profess. For the solution of these doubts there are a few simple rules.

1. "Hold fast that which thou hast." In the midst of this uncertainty, some things will be certain. Adhere to these. You are perplexed about many duties but there are duties about which you have no misgivings. Set right about them with a resolute purpose and a thorough diligence.

2. Resolve that just as fast as truth is given you, you will accept it and live by it.

3. Remember that religious truth can never be ascertained by mere speculation. It is largely truth of experience and can only find entrance to the mind through the life. It is heat as well as light, and you must suffer it to warm the heart as well as to illuminate the intellect. That is to say, you must study it with your affections as well as with your reason. Take therefore the character of Christ as delineated in the Gospels, and the character of God as Christ has unfolded it in his teachings, and reverently study them, asking yourself all the while what

relation you sustain to these persons; and whether there is in your heart and life any room for such a friendship as that which Christ offers, any need of such a salvation as he has provided, any witness to the truth of which his life is the revelation. I think that when you come to study carefully first your own moral condition, and then the person and work of Jesus Christ, you will find a marvelous correlation between them, and that you will be convinced that he is indeed the very Friend you need. If you will then commit yourself to him as your Saviour and your Guide, you will soon find the way out of your bewilderment.

This topic is too large to be treated here with any fullness; let me commend to all whose lives are sometimes overcast by the haze of unbelief, a noble sermon of Dr. Bushnell's, printed in his last volume, and entitled "The Dissolving of Doubts."

I have spoken now of the Christian's quiet hour in the closet, the hour that is sacred to study and thought and prayer, the hour which he sets apart for silent communings with things unseen and with Him whose presence fills all

secret places. But the Christian lives a quiet life outside the closet. His communion with high truth, and with the Invisible God is not all enjoyed in secret places. In the clatter of the shop, in the din of the street, in the hum of busy voices he is often alone with God.

"Still with thee, O my God,
I would desire to be,
By day, by night, at home, abroad,
I would be still with thee.

"With thee when dawn comes in
And calls me back to care;
Each day returning to begin
With thee, my God, in prayer.

"With Thee amid the crowd
That throngs the busy mart;
To hear thy voice, 'mid clamor loud,
Speak softly to my heart."

It is this consciousness of a presence always near, in the noise as well as in the silence, of a help that never fails in danger and extremity, that makes the Christian's life so blessed. The comfort of this assurance is very sweet. So long as he keeps it he is safe from temptation and strong for duty. The Friend that walks unseen beside Him is mighty to deliver. His

thought, reaching out in the pauses of his toil, in the emergencies of his experience, always rests on the Almighty Helper. Quick as the volition can spring from the brain to the eyelid, the desire can fly to Immanuel and come back satisfied. "Let your thoughts," says Dr. Alexander, "during the employments of the day often go up in ejaculatory prayer, which is so called because such aspirations are like arrows shot up toward heaven; and blessed is he that hath his quiver full of them.'

THE END.

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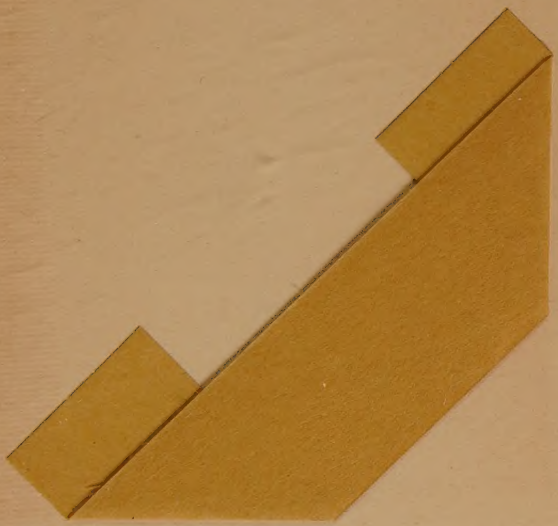

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